

**Univerzita Karlova v Praze – Filozofická fakulta**  
**Ústav anglofonních literatur a kultur**

**Symbolism of the Vampire in English Romanticism**  
**Symbolismus upíra v anglickém romantismu**  
**Bakalářská práce**

Vedoucí bakalářské práce (supervisor):  
Mgr. Mirka Horová, PhD

Prague, August 2018

Zpracoval/a (author):

Bc. Jaroslava Šůvová

Studijní obor (subject/s):

Anglistika a amerikanistika - literatura

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně, že jsem řádně citovala všechny použité prameny a literaturu a že práce nebyla využita v rámci jiného vysokoškolského studia či k získání jiného či stejného titulu.

I declare that the following BA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.

**V Praze dne**

.....

**Jaroslava Sůvová**

## **Abstrakt**

Postavu upíra proslavil zejména Bram Stoker ve svém Drákulovi. Nicméně Drákula nebyl prvním upírem v britské literatuře a jeho kořeny se dají vystopovat až do období romantismu. Tato bakalářská práce se bude zabývat otázkou symboliky upírů ve vybraných dílech anglického romantismu od konce 18. a do prvních dekád 19. století. Zaměří se zejména na díla Samuela T. Coleridge, Johna Keatse, lorda Byrona a Johna Williama Polidoriho a jejich pojetí upířích postav. Předmětem této práce je zjistit, jak tyto postavy v jednotlivých literárních dílech fungují, co přesně symbolizují a zda představují něco hlubšího než „ty druhé“, „opovrhované“ a „prokleté“.

## **Abstract**

The character of the vampire was popularized especially by Bram Stoker's Dracula. However, Dracula was not the first vampire in British literature and his origins can be traced back to Romanticism. This bachelor thesis will look into the issue of symbolism of vampires in the selected works of English Romanticism from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main focus will be on the works of Samuel T. Coleridge, John Keats, Lord Byron and John William Polidori and their approach towards the characters of vampires. The aim of this thesis is to determine what is the function of these characters in the works, what exactly they symbolize, and whether they represent something deeper than “the other”, “the abject” and “the damned”.

## **Klíčová slova**

britská literatura, romantismus, upír

## **Key words**

British Literature, Romanticism, Vampire

## **Poděkování**

Zde bych ráda poděkovala Mgr. Mirce Horové, PhD, za vedení práce, užitečné rady a připomínky.

## **Permission**

Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

I have no objections to the BA thesis being borrowed and used for study purposes.

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	1
2	<i>The Giaour</i> .....	3
2.1	Greek Origins, Nationalism, Orientalism.....	3
2.2	Imaginary Vampire: The Idea of a Vampire .....	6
2.3	Fragmentation, Conjecture, Elision: Formal Framing of the Romantic Vampire.....	10
2.4	The Byronic Hero as a Vampiric Creation.....	13
3	<i>The Vampyre</i> .....	18
3.1	Byron's <i>Fragment of a Novel</i> .....	18
3.2	Polidori's Theft and Publication, and Byronic Celebrity as Vampirism .....	20
4	<i>Lamia</i> and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" .....	27
4.1	<i>Lamia</i> versus the Original Mythology .....	27
4.2	Abjection, Gender, Sexuality, and Female Agency .....	32
4.3	"La Belle Dame sans Merci" .....	39
5	<i>Christabel</i> .....	44
5.1	Fragmentation of the Vampire and Fragmentation as a Symbol of the Vampire .....	44
5.2	Abjection, Gender, and Female Agency .....	49
6	Conclusion.....	54
7	Bibliography .....	58

# 1 Introduction

In our modern age, the image of the vampire seems rather ubiquitous with all their various manifestations, whether it be a blood-thirsty monster, an emotionally torn apart aristocrat, or their innocuous cousins from teenage novels. However, the character who has left the most influential and popular archetypal vampire for the modern age is Count Dracula created by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Irish author Bram Stoker. Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate to claim that Dracula was the first vampire to appear in English (or any) literature. In fact, while Count Dracula may have captured the attention of the future generations who kept his (often slightly altered) legend alive in various forms and media, it has to be pointed out that Dracula, together with his famous female counterpart found in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's character of Carmilla, are also results of certain development of previous literary tendencies concerning the characters of vampires.

In order to find the origins of the vampires of Victorian literature, one must look back towards the first two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the second generation of the Romantic poets were at their productive height. In the middle of breath-taking landscapes, dark abandoned ruins, and romantic heroes or villains, there were bloodthirsty demons stalking their prey in the night and claiming their innocent victims. Although these vampires were one of the first literary vampires in the English literature, what must be acknowledged is that they shared very few commonalities with their folkloric predecessors. In fact, in the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), George Gordon Byron (1778-1824), John Keats (1795-1821), and in the disputed novel by John Polidori (1795-1821), the reader meets vampires of appearance and behaviour that is often antithetical to their folkloric counterparts. Among the Romantic vampires, there are no ugly decomposing and zombie-like monsters roaming the countryside, but monsters meticulously hidden under deadly beauty, apparent good manners and charming behaviour.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the vampiric characters created by the abovementioned authors and determine what lies beyond their characterization of "the damned," "the abject," and "the other." The thesis will also discuss what is their function in the text and the issues pertaining to their often ambiguous symbolism. An inattentive reader might dismiss the Giaour, Lord Ruthven, Geraldine, *la belle dame* or Lamia as simply evil vampires or *femmes fatales* who abuse and feed on their victims because it is in their nature, which is invariably the case in the previous, folkloric or mythological, depictions of vampires or vampire-like creatures the prime example being Greek mythology. However, the issue of the "new vampire" in English

Romanticism is that if the authors wanted to simply show an evil monster they could have used the same monster we see in the previous eras: an ugly flesh-devouring or blood-sucking zombie. Nevertheless, the vampire that emerged in Romanticism appears to be, in some respects, far away from the folkloric and mythological origins, which creates an ambiguity in what factors and circumstances played a role in the transformation that forever altered the phenomenon of the vampire for future decades and centuries.

One path of inquiry concerning these new vampires is to explore each of them separately and to determine their character as well as the symbolism in the context of the work as each author gave their vampire a different set of traits and characteristics while drawing their inspiration from different sources. This thesis will focus on Byron's *The Giaour*, Polidori's *The Vampyre*, Keats's *Lamia* and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" and Coleridge's *Christabel* and with the help of the context of their individual work, the context of its age, and the authors' biographical facts, it will examine the undercurrents beneath the simplistic characterization of "evil" predators in order to understand the deeper, complex symbolism of the Romantic vampire.

## 2 *The Giaour*

### 2.1 Greek Origins, Nationalism, Orientalism

One of the first mentions of a vampire in English Romantic literature appears in Byron's *The Giaour, a Fragment of a Turkish Tale*, published in 1813. His original inspiration springs quite obviously from his own experience as he took a very unconventional route for his European Grand Tour, a tradition very popular among the English aristocracy. Unlike his peers, who usually travelled through France, Switzerland and Italy, Byron took, because of the Napoleonic Wars, a rather peculiar route through Portugal and the south of Spain, across the Mediterranean to Greece in 1809-1811, where he found not only literary inspiration but also a place to express his political enthusiasm for helping Greece obtain its freedom from its Ottoman rulers. *The Giaour* seems to contain many of the themes he found in Greece, be it Greek nationalism and thirst for freedom from the oppressors, to tales of the Muslim world, or indeed superstitious stories about the living dead.

Although being the most famous vampire in literature, Dracula would have readers believe that the source of all vampire stories originates from Transylvania or more widely Eastern Europe, Greece holds a long and vivid tradition of superstitious tales about the dead rising from their graves. In 1755, a physician at the imperial court, Gerhard van Swieten (1700-1772), a fierce opponent of superstitious beliefs and one of the first "experts" on vampires, was tasked to write a report on a vampire panic in Serbia and Moravia.<sup>1</sup> In the Italian translation, he mentions that vampire stories were popular in countries ruled by ignorance and places the blame on the "schismatic Greeks."<sup>2</sup>

In his report Gerhard van Swieten also mentions another account of Greek origins of vampire tales, that of the French botanist Joseph Pitton de Tournefort (1656-1708), who travelled across the Greek islands and in 1700 witnessed a major event on the island of Mykonos.<sup>3</sup> Tournefort recorded that a certain farmer with bad reputation among the local people died but a few days after his death he was seen walking through the village committing acts of vandalism. The villagers were confident that the origin of all the incidents was the unpopular farmer who now walks among the living as a so-called "*vrukolakas*." After numerous attempts to get rid of the vampire, which included (much to Tournefort's displeasure) cutting out his

---

<sup>1</sup> Tommaso Braccini, *Před Draculou Archeologie upíra* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2011), přel. Tereza Siegllová (Praha: Argo, 2014) 21.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Braccini, 15-19.



heart and saying prayers, the locals decided to burn the decaying body, after which the mysterious incidents stopped.<sup>4</sup> Tournefort's account describes a vampire found in Greek folklore as a dead peasant who was known among his neighbours as an unpleasant individual and who walks through his village and causes all kinds of mischievous incidents after his death.

However, the most famous (although not the first one) account concerning vampires comes from Leon Allatios (cca 1586-1669), the keeper of the Vatican library between the years 1661-1669. Originally from the Greek island of Chios, he was probably quite familiar with the Greek folktales about the living dead. In his document, called *De Graecorum hodie quorundam opinionibus* (*On certain modern opinions among the Greeks*) published in 1645 in Cologne, he draws from his own experience upon returning to Chios and from numerous other written sources in the library.<sup>5</sup> He describes vampires as the living dead who were excommunicated by the Church, whose bodies are reanimated by the devil or the devil takes on the form of the dead person who wanders around the village calling people's names, and if someone answers the call, then they die the next day. Among the symptoms of such a possession by the devil is a well-preserved body and so burning the body is one of the most effective solutions to the problem.<sup>6</sup>

It is quite safe to say that Byron was aware of these stories and tales about the dead coming back from their graves and that it was from the Greek folklore that he got the idea of a vampire, a cursed revenant, stalking the dwellings of the living, causing all kinds of mischief or even death. However, vampire stories only offer an explanation as to the origin of such a creature which Byron, and consequently other authors, transformed into something slightly more intricate.

One of the major contextual backgrounds to the story of *The Giaour* appears to be Greek nationalism and strife for liberty from the Turkish rulers. Byron himself was to become very involved in the movement, eventually dying in the war against the Turks. His passion, typical of Romantic liberalism, to liberate Greece seems obvious even from the symbolic description of the Greek landscape, and the patriotic struggles of its inhabitants:

Arise, and make again your own;  
Snatch from the ashes of your Sires  
The embers of their former fires;

---

<sup>4</sup> Braccini, 15-19.

<sup>5</sup> Braccini, 26-27.

<sup>6</sup> Braccini 27-28.

And he who in the strife expires  
 Will add to theirs a name of fear  
 That Tyranny shall quake to hear,  
 And leave his sons a hope, a fame,  
 They too will rather die than shame:  
 For Freedom's battle once begun,  
 Bequeathed by bleeding Sire to Son,  
 Though baffled oft is ever won. (115-125)

In further stanzas he offers a description of a dead, cold and sunless country and mentions the glorious victories of the Greek past in the form of Thermopylae and Salamis to eventually appeal to rise against the Turks and their tyranny. However, the problem of a tyrant, or indeed who is the tyrant, is at the core of the poem. Tyranny being tightly bound to the character of a vampire, a predator that sucks the life out of his victim, be it a person or a land, it seems rather ambiguous whether it is the Giaour or Hassan who is supposed to be the tyrant, for that is the key question: Is it Hassan as the tyrannical Turk who usurps the whole country or the Giaour who is explicitly said to be a vampire in the future?

This issue of identifying the villain seems to be also projected onto the undercurrent of orientalism in the poem. In his essay “‘I Know Thee not, I Loathe Thy Race’: Romantic Orientalism in the Eye of the Other”, Eric Meyer points out Byron’s fascination with Napoleon, whose Egyptian campaign was mostly an aggressive conquest disguised as a liberating mission. Further he mentions an incident when Napoleon started an affair with a local Egyptian girl, who was later arrested, tried and eventually executed for collaboration with the infidel.<sup>7</sup> Quite obviously, this theme of a native woman executed by her own people for having an affair with a foreign invader appears in Byron’s *The Giaour* possibly based on his knowledge of this event.

Influenced by Napoleon’s “liberating” campaign, Byron probably saw himself as one such liberator of female oppression in the East and started his own campaign against the Turks in Greece and obviously used it as a theme in his work, no doubt seeing Napoleon, the Giaour and himself as the hero.<sup>8</sup> Meyer, however, describes this as an allegory of conflicting cultural interests “which ... are tangibly focused in the need to lay claim to the bodies of Asian women, to penetrate and possess the Oriental harem, and to assert control over its compliant subjects.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Eric Meyer, “‘I Know Thee not, I Loathe Thy Race’: Romantic Orientalism in the Eye of the Other,” *ELH* 58.3 (1991): 658-659, JSTOR < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2873460> >, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

<sup>8</sup> Meyer, 660.

<sup>9</sup> Meyer, 659.

There is no doubt that Hassan is a tyrant, nevertheless the Giaour's heroism seems more than problematic. For as Meyer explains:

The incident of the death of Napoleon's harem girl thus serves to initiate an inquiry into the workings of Romantic Orientalism as a site of cultural contestation in which the violent conflict for ideological hegemony over political terrain is figured in the struggles of men to assert power over Eastern women, who embody the mirage of the Orient in its most ambiguously sexual and politically charged form.<sup>10</sup>

Since the Giaour does not really liberate Leila and in fact his "liberation" comes at the cost of her life, it is no coincidence that Hassan and the Giaour share some characteristics, which makes them very similar in character. After all, it is Hassan who is the most obvious colonial tyrant as he represents the main colonial power in the poem, the Ottoman Empire, and it is Hassan who can also be called the colonial vampire, so the similarity between these two characters certainly does not seem to be coincidental. Therefore, it might be possible that there is more to the Giaour's vampirism than just a curse from a Muslim fisherman. If a vampire represents a tyrant, it can be said that the Giaour is not so different from Hassan. The Giaour is aware of his own blame as he claims that his current state in the monastery is not caused by the killing of Hassan but by Leila's death. It is unclear whether Byron intended such a politically ambiguous outcome, especially considering his admiration for Napoleon and much later his own liberating campaign in Greece, but seeing the Giaour simply as a hero from the West and a victim of the enemy's curse (be it imaginary or real) would be a simplistic explanation of the events.

## **2.2 Imaginary Vampire: The Idea of a Vampire**

One of the major issues with the theme of a vampire in *The Giaour* is no actual vampire in the story. The only mention of it comes from the Muslim fisherman, who witnesses the execution of Leila. The fisherman shows his firm allegiance to Hassan when he judges both characters, the Giaour and Hassan, very similar in character and behaviour, in an extremely different way. The speaker's fellow Muslim and ruler Hassan is predicted heaven:

---

<sup>10</sup> Meyer, 659.

But him the maids of Paradise  
Impatient to their halls invite,  
And the dark Heaven of Houris' eyes  
On him shall glance for ever bright;  
They come - their kerchiefs green they wave,  
And welcome with a kiss the brave!  
Who falls in battle 'gainst a Giaour  
Is worthiest an immortal bower. (739-746)

The Giaour, Hassan's murderer, on the other hand, is predicted torture beyond hell:

But first, on earth as vampire sent,  
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent:  
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,  
And suck the blood of all thy race;  
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,  
At midnight drain the stream of life;  
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce  
Must feed thy livid living corse. (755-762)

While one issue is the speaker's allegiance to Hassan, the nature of his statement poses another problem. From the monk's description of the events following the death of Leila, there is no mention that the Giaour would have any siblings or even wife and children. It can be assumed then that the fisherman's statement is simply a curse of a loyal servant whose lord was slain by the hand of the infidel, or only a wish. However, if one remembers the Giaour's later description given by another speaker, the monk in the monastery, where the Giaour finds refuge in his misery, it might seem appropriate to reconsider the fisherman's curse. The monk describes him as a dark figure who refuses anything holy and divine and spends his time alone in his cell or brooding:

Saint Francis, keep him from the shrine!  
Else may we dread the wrath divine  
Made manifest by awful sign.  
If ever evil angel bore

The form of mortal, such he wore:  
By all my hope of sins forgiven,  
Such looks are not of earth nor heaven! (909-915)

Although there is no proof of the fisherman's prophecy having come true, even the monk thinks there is something supernatural and demonic about the Giaour. For while the story begins in Turkish Greece with descriptions of colourful palaces and beautiful but terrible landscape with characters of beautiful courtesans and tyrannical Muslim rulers, the end of the poem contains a significantly different atmosphere and tone. Suddenly the reader is taken to a grim monastery and a monk describes the Giaour as if he was something strange, unnatural, and evil. It is here that the Oriental story suddenly changes its course and a Gothic narrative emerges the moment the fisherman utters his curse.

Oriental and Gothic forms have many features in common, of course:

Gothicism and Orientalism do the work of fiction more generally — providing imaginary characters, situations, and stories as alternative to, even as escape from, the reader's everyday reality. But they operate more sensationally than other types of fiction. Pleasurable terror and pleasurable exoticism are kindred experiences, with unreality and strangeness at the root of both.<sup>11</sup>

However, the end of the story carries the atmosphere of terror more than exoticism as the reader finds himself in a Gothic story. Generally, imagination has an enormous power in Gothic narratives as it helps to build the atmosphere of terror or imagined horror lurking in the dark corners of the castle catacombs. There might be nothing at all but the very imagination of the character or the reader can make it appear so. In his book *Gothic*, Fred Botting states:

Associated with wildness, Gothic signified an over-abundance of imaginative frenzy, untamed by reason and unrestrained by conventional eighteenth-century demands for simplicity, realism or probability.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> "Romantic Orientalism: Overview," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* <  
[https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic\\_4/welcome.htm](https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic_4/welcome.htm)>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996) 3.

Botting continues that “in Gothic productions imagination and emotional effects exceed reason”<sup>13</sup> and “differences between fantasy and actuality [are] no longer secure.”<sup>14</sup> If one considers the fisherman’s curse as a wish or his own imagination driven by his desire to punish the Giaour for killing Hassan, it could be possible that the imagination was strong enough to influence the reality in a certain way and the Giaour actually was cursed partially by the fisherman and partially by himself.

In reference to the first topic, of tyranny, in the poem, the switch from an Oriental story to a Gothic one can be explained in relation to the Giaour’s situation of becoming an unlikely tyrant. As Botting says, “Gothic becomes the dark or negative side to Romanticism.”<sup>15</sup> In a way, it could be also said that in this poem the Gothic theme is the nightmarish continuation of the Oriental narrative.

In recent years, the trend in literary criticism has been of further politicization of Romantic Orientalism:

Such recontextualizing of Romantic Orientalism gives it a decidedly contemporary and political character involving questions of national identity, cultural difference, the morality of imperialist domination, and consequent anxiety and guilt concerning such issues.<sup>16</sup>

As was already suggested above, the Giaour is not depicted as a *bona fide* hero in the poem and when considered from the post-colonial point of view he is no better than Hassan, which makes the Giaour quite an interesting and ambiguous character with both positive and negative traits where there is no victory of good over evil and no character’s reformation and submission to traditional morality. This ambiguity features significantly in the new type of a hero: the Byronic hero of modernity where nothing and no one is black and white, but portrayed in torturous shades of grey.

---

<sup>13</sup> Botting, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Botting 12.

<sup>15</sup> Botting, 18.

<sup>16</sup> “Romantic Orientalism: Overview.” *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*.

## 2.3 Fragmentation, Conjecture, Elision: Formal Framing of the Romantic

### Vampire

*The Giaour* was published in a fragmented form intentionally. As Peter L. Thorslev says, Byron wanted the poem to consist of “disjointed fragments” to which he even added a few more stanzas after the first publication and made it even more complex. Overall, the whole poem includes twenty different fragments and three narrators.<sup>17</sup> Among the narrators there is the main narrative voice, a muslim fisherman, the witness to Leila’s death, and also the originator of the Giaour’s curse, and a monk, who finally receives his confession in the monastery where he finds his final refuge. As a whole the poem presents a very fragmented result consisting of various accounts and points of view, thus creating a compelling patchwork of voices and conflicting agencies, which brings ambiguity and mystery to the fore.

Just like Romanticism itself, the fragmented form is a reaction to Neoclassicism, for while the latter puts emphasis on symmetry, clarity and reason, the former rebels with incoherence, mysteriousness, and irrationality both in content and form.<sup>18</sup> Consisting of small parts from various sources, the fragmented form works in such ways as to emphasise the suspense and mystery in the plot and this leaves the reader in a state of uncertainty, just like the characters themselves, causing the reader to create their own subjective interpretation of the story. There is no all-knowing and all-seeing narrator who would lead the readers by the hand and show them everything from a distance, instead the reader has to walk by himself or herself not only experiencing everything the same way the characters do but also interpreting those experiences through the reader’s individual and subjective vantage point, thus rendering any attempt to provide an objective and universal interpretation or understanding of the text moot.

The fragmented form is not a completely unified category because as it always depends on something or on someone’s interpretation for meaning.<sup>19</sup> There are many reasons why a text may be presented as a fragment; it might either be an accidental fragment as part of an unfinished work, or a fragment as a part of a larger whole where it depends on the circumstances of its creation or on the other fragments included in the whole.<sup>20</sup> However, none of this is the case of *The Giaour* - an intended fragment - which “demands the reader search within the poem for its completion.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, it is up to the reader to make sense of the poem as there is not much information provided from the author himself. As a symbol, the fragment acts as a

---

<sup>17</sup> Peter L. Thorslev, Jr., *The Byronic Hero* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962) 149.

<sup>18</sup> Botting, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Allport, “The Romantic Fragment Poem and the Performance of the Form,” *Studies in Romanticism* 5.3 (2012): 408, JSTOR < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24247307>>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Allport, 400-404.

<sup>21</sup> Allport, 409.

metaphorical “tip of the iceberg”, which means it shows only parts of the whole, hiding the fractured emotional and psychological content<sup>22</sup> and thus adding ambiguity concerning the plot and the characters, engaging the reader’s own imagination which attempts to construct some form of coherent whole out of the fragment.

In Gothic literature, fragmentation is one of its most important features. Just like Romantic literature, Gothic uses the themes of suspense and mystery, both of which fragmentation only strengthens by creating an atmosphere of chaos and fear. Very much like a human mind under pressure or in fear, the Gothic fragment is incoherent, chaotic, and often even failing in moments of distress in the same way that a frenetic or excited mind rarely works rationally or recalls events chronologically. The fragmentation of the Gothic narrative provides the reader with small islands of light among the sea of darkness where the truth is obscured and unclear, and the reader’s mind is triggered by the distress.

As mentioned before, the whole poem consists of the disjointed narratives of three speakers: the poet, the fisherman and the monk. The issue with such a form is that each of the narrators describes their own reality which might not be the reality for the other characters or speakers. Therefore, we have three versions of reality, each somehow distorted and prejudiced. Considering the perspective of the main narrative voice, the poet, he opens the poem with a lengthy glorification of Ancient Greece, excited calls for revolution, for liberty, against the usurpers. One can easily imagine Byron himself behind this voice, invoking the glorious past and applying it on his contemporary Greece not realizing that such an image of Greece no longer exists, if it ever existed. Similarly, he imagines the Giaour to be a liberator, the hero of the story.

The second narrator, the Muslim fisherman, also sees the glory of the land through the lens of his bias. He is a loyal servant to Hassan, he witnessed the death of Leila, according to the Turkish law. The fisherman shows the reader his own story where he describes the dead palace of his master in contrast of its former glory. Unlike the poet, who wishes the death of the usurpers, in the fisherman’s narrative, the death of Hassan means the death of the land (as depicted in the abandoned and silent palace as a symbol of bygone life).

The last narrator is the monk. Just like the previous speakers, he is also influenced by his background and his point of view of life. In his case it is his religious devotion and faith that makes his reality distorted. Without even knowing the Giaour very well, he seems to show silent hostility towards the stranger because he opposes his way of life and his faith: he does not pray, he does not care for holiness and he does not seek forgiveness. Naturally, the monk sees the

---

<sup>22</sup> Allport, 411.



Giaour as an alien, as a dangerous and suspicious individual and describes him in a very unflattering light as a villain with evil eyes and a bitter and terrifying smile.

Therefore, all three narrators offer their own versions of the story based on what they want it to be: the poet wants an epic story of liberation, the fisherman wants an elegy for his master, and the monk wants a cautionary story about the devil among the lambs of God. The whole poem is fragmented by their different, conflicting views and offers the reader only a small portion or a very distorted version of events quite like a mosaic assembled from three fragmented and incomplete manuscripts in order to unsuccessfully recreate a sense of the whole image.

The same works for the characters in the Gothic texts and most importantly for the villains. As Botting says about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:

Fragmented, disunified, assembled from bits and pieces, the novel is like the monster itself, and like the unnatural, disproportionate monsters of Gothic romances.<sup>23</sup>

This can be applied to many of the Gothic creatures throughout the genre. Even the Romantic vampire is in a way a Frankenstein's monster, fragmented and assembled from bits and pieces both inside and out. Although Frankenstein's monster appears to be literally made of bits and pieces, the Romantic vampire's seams are not as visible. The pieces of his physical appearance and character consist of various cultural and literary sources, be it Greek folklore, the Byronic hero, and in the case of the female vampire, Greek mythology and the Bible. All these culturally charged pieces helped to create a monster of the modern age that changed and evolved throughout time, finally emerging in Romantic writing with fragments of its past incarnations still present.

While the name and basic characteristics of the vampire comes from medieval legends and folklore, the physical appearance differs significantly. Originally in the Greek tradition, the vampire is a revenant peasant harassing his neighbours by knocking at their doors but this manifestation does not appear in Romantic literature. In fact, it is hard to believe that such a mindless monster of bygone times would seem very appealing to them. Instead of a rather dull zombie from medieval times, the Romantics offer their own aesthetically augmented version of it. Although the name "vampire" is the same, the appearance is completely different, for in Romanticism we have a handsome and charismatic man, often a seductive lover from an

---

<sup>23</sup> Botting, 102.

elevated social position, as the monk points out in his part of the poem. He has the dark looks and temperament of the Gothic villain and its bespoke Romantic permutation, the Byronic hero. Formally, the Romantic vampire seems to be a legend rewritten to suit its contemporary audience and the tastes of the author. Given that the second generation of the Romantic poets like Byron and Shelley were mostly interested in individualistic titans and cursed anti-heroes living on the edge or outside the society, the character of a vampire represents the extreme version of such a hero, the ultimate outcast, where his very existence goes against every rule of nature and society.

Due to the fragmentation of the narratives, the character of the Giaour becomes fragmented among them as well. The poet sees him as the liberator and the hero, the fisherman sees him as the villain who broke the law and killed his beloved master and the monk sees him as an undeserving infiltrator of his holy monastery and a villain as well who bought his way in. Through their lens one sees a hero, a villain and an unholy man but each of these views are very simplistic and fragmented views of the whole character of the Giaour, the man who lost his love and cannot forgive himself for that. Generally, a fragment represents and symbolizes the incompleteness or the impossibility of completeness of the whole, be it a text or the world itself. Similarly, the fragmented nature of the vampire represents the same concept, only applied to a specific literary character. The idea of incomplete and fragmented identity challenges the traditional narrative and thus signifies the next step into literary and imaginative modernity.

## **2.4 The Byronic Hero as a Vampiric Creation**

According to Mario Praz, without the Byronic hero the vampire might have never become a serious subject.<sup>24</sup> Considering the previous version of the vampire in mythology or folklore, one has to agree with such a statement, especially given that there are not many interesting stories about undead peasant protagonists. With the rise of popularity of the emotionally charged, pre-Romantic heroes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the vampire almost sneaked into the trend and depicted an extreme version of a Byronic hero, a mixture, or showing influence, of various Romantic heroes well known before Byron. As Thorslev explains:

---

<sup>24</sup> James B. Twitchell, *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981) 75.

The main point, however, is that all the elements of the Byronic Hero existed before him in the literature of the age. This hero is unique, in one sense, in the powerful fusion of these disparate elements into a single commanding image; but he did not spring by a miracle of parthenogenesis from Byron's mind; he is to a large extent a product of a Romantic heroic tradition which was a half-century old before he appeared.<sup>25</sup>

However, the Byronic hero appears to be a result of a long development of Romantic heroes all of whom had an impact on the character of the rebellious outcasts and consequently on the vampire as well. According to Thorslev with the rise of Deism in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of a "natural man" also appears and his first personification became the noble savage.<sup>26</sup> His successor, the Child of Nature, changed its characterization according to an increasingly more and more sentimental age: young and naïve, innocent and ignorant man, coming from the lowest origins and brought up in wilderness (although his birth is often shrouded in mystery) was indeed a child untouched by civilization.<sup>27</sup> His appearance corresponds with his upbringing: handsome, strong and healthy, with an almost aggressive attitude.<sup>28</sup>

As the 18<sup>th</sup> century became more and more sentimental, the Child of Nature turned into a more sensitive and effeminate hero called the Hero of Sensibility. Distinguished by a benevolent nature and a good heart, a pale complexion and fragile constitution, this type of hero stands higher on the social ladder and usually comes from the middle class or lower gentry, and, unlike the uneducated child of nature, seems to be well-educated.<sup>29</sup> Another of his characterizations is his self-imposed isolation caused by his heightened sensitivity.<sup>30</sup> The Hero of Sensibility has two subtypes: the Man of Feeling and the later Gloomy Egoist as a result of further secularization of society.<sup>31</sup> While the pious and devout Man of Feeling shows his morality and goodness sincerely, the Gloomy Egoist shows a slightly more cynical attitude where his moral arguments are simply a rationalization of his deeds.<sup>32</sup>

Further development of the Romantic hero is marked by Gothic fiction in the form of the Gothic villain. However, it is difficult to call him a hero since this type of character breaks the rules and laws intentionally, and since he has no redemptive features.<sup>33</sup> Simply said, he is only

---

<sup>25</sup> Thorslev, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Thorslev, 29.

<sup>27</sup> Thorslev, 30.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Thorslev, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Thorslev, 35-37.

<sup>32</sup> Thorslev, 37-38.

<sup>33</sup> Thorslev, 53.

a villain who will never regret any of his sins. The Gothic villain again climbed the social ladder from his predecessor, the Hero of Sensibility, from middle class to aristocracy, to emphasise his power over things and people around him. There is not much left of the Child of Nature, however, only the mysterious circumstances of his birth or origin. In fact, his whole character seems to be shrouded in mystery and such a state of affairs usually involves some past sins or transgressions.<sup>34</sup> In appearance, the Gothic villain only confirms his inner attitude: instead of a plain-looking fragile Hero of Sensibility, there is a villain of handsome and charismatic appearance, tall and manly in constitution, with the most striking feature often being his eyes.<sup>35</sup>

However, not even the Gothic villain stayed the same throughout Romanticism. Especially in drama, he underwent further changes which brought him closer to the Byronic hero. By the turn of the century, the theatrical Gothic villain gained more and more redeeming characteristics.<sup>36</sup> Although he is still a transgressor and sinner, he shows deep remorse over his past actions and just like the Man of Feeling, he analyses his feelings.<sup>37</sup> With this progress the Gothic villain in drama even becomes the main character of the plays as, for example, in the 1801 play *Julian and Agnes* by Reverend William Sotheby, which represents the link between the Gothic villain and the Byronic hero.<sup>38</sup> The plot shows a bigamist, Julian, who, pressed by his sinful life, leaves the world and finds his place in a monastery where he rides out to help travellers in dangerous situations. On one occasion, Julian saves the lives of his wives but gets wounded and dies after he is forgiven by both of them. Julian may seem very close to the Byronic hero but it has to be pointed out that despite being a remorseful sinner, in the end he, unlike the Byronic hero, conforms to the traditional morality.<sup>39</sup> According to Thorslev the first Romantic hero who truly refuses to conform to the requirements of traditional morality emerges at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as the so called the Noble Outlaw<sup>40</sup> famous thanks to the *Sturm und Drang* movement, exemplified in Friedrich Schiller's play *The Robbers* (*Die Räuber*, 1781). The Gothic villain is now no longer a member of aristocracy, but comes from a lower position and takes the form of a fierce and charismatic leader of his band of bandits, who might commit numerous transgressions or crimes but this kind of rebellion is always with a justifiable motif and for a justifiable reason.<sup>41</sup> Although they share remorse for their past sins,

---

<sup>34</sup> Thorslev, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Thorslev, 53.

<sup>36</sup> Thorslev, 57.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Thorslev, 60.

<sup>39</sup> Thorslev, 61

<sup>40</sup> Thorslev, 66.

<sup>41</sup> Thorslev, 69.

another difference between the Gothic villain and the Noble Outlaw is that the latter is never intentionally cruel and does not hurt other characters.

The Byronic hero and the vampire in Romanticism draw from the past emulations of a similar character mentioned above. In the case of the Giaour, certain characteristics of these heroes and villains can be recognized. Although we do not know much about his past or his class, we definitely know his appearance. Thorslev points out that the Giaour has at least the looks and defiance of the Gothic villain.<sup>42</sup> When the monk describes him, he says:

See - by the half-illumin'd wall  
His hood fly back, his dark hair fall,  
That pale brow wildly wreathing round,  
As if the Gorgon there had bound  
The sablest of the serpent-braid  
That o'er her fearful forehead strayed. (893-898)

He sees a slightly terrifying man with pale complexion and dark hair. However, the most striking feature of the Gothic villain and the Giaour himself is his “evil eye” in the following two passages:

Though young and pale, that sallow front  
Is scathed by fiery passion's brunt;  
Though bent on earth thine evil eye (194-196)

'Tis he! 'tis he! I know him now;  
I know him by his pallid brow;  
I know him by the evil eye (610-612)

However, the Giaour is not purely a Gothic villain given that he shares the sensitivity of the Man of Feeling, his self-reflection in the final confession and the background of the Noble Outlaw when he attacks Hassan with his band of bandits.<sup>43</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> Thorslev, 150.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

The original appearance and characteristics of the vampire in folklore seem hardly attractive to any reader or poet. However, with the arrival of sentimental sensibility, sensitive heroes and charismatic villains brought new inspiration for writers who wanted to pursue the theme of the damned individual on the edge of society. Botting describes the Romantic hero in Gothic literature as follows:

The darker, agonized aspect of Romantic writing has heroes in the Gothic mould: gloomy, isolated and sovereign, they are wanderers, outcasts, rebels condemned to roam the borders of social worlds, bearers of a dark truth or horrible knowledge.<sup>44</sup>

Elevating the vampire from a zombie to the level of a Romantic hero brought him the appeal to and sympathies of the audience. His dark side was intriguing and strangely charismatic and his good side was moving. Byron redressed the old story in a new extreme form of a dark Byronic hero: non-human, supernatural, paying the ultimate price for his sins – never-ending suffering and remorsefulness. As Twitchell says:

Personification of a most peculiar kind of exiled man, eternally outcast yet dependent on others, a lover yet incapable of loving, a superman yet a pathetic weakling, a Napoleon among men.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Botting, 98.

<sup>45</sup> Twitchell, 75.

### 3 *The Vampyre*

#### 3.1 Byron's *Fragment of a Novel*

The same fateful spring and summer of 1816 that Mary Shelley wrote her masterpiece *Frankenstein* also produced Polidori *The Vampyre*, a tale that was no doubt inspired by Lord Byron's *Fragment*. Set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the narrator, a young man, sets on a journey around Europe with a slightly older man called Augustus Darvell (or at least that is how the narrator decides to call him in the story). He describes him as rich aristocrat with a cold and reserved attitude as well as worldly experience which the narrator lacks. He also mentions Darvell's mysterious past of which he learns only through gossip and rumours. In spite of this, or maybe because of it, the narrator finds Darvell intriguing, even though, as he admits, Darvell is very hard to read and approach, and he senses something odd about his companion. He says:

Where there is mystery, it is generally supposed that there must also be evil: I know not how this may be, but in him there certainly was the one, though I could not ascertain the extent of the other.<sup>46</sup>

As they are travelling east through southern Europe, the narrator notices that Darvell's health is worsening every day without any obvious signs of illness and he refuses to stop. After travelling through Smyrna towards the ruins of Ephesus, Sardis (in today's Turkey), and through wilderness, Darvell finally collapses at a remote Turkish cemetery. When Darvell sends the servant for water with specific instructions the narrator learns that he had visited the place before without any further explanation. Darvell expects his own death and makes the narrator swear an oath that he will never speak about his death to anyone. Then he gives him a ring with Arabic symbols and tells him that on the ninth day of the ninth month (therefore in one year's time) at noon he has to toss it into the salt springs that run into the Bay of Eleusis. After performing this act, on the next day at the same hour he must go to the ruins of the temple of Ceres and wait for an hour. As they speak a stork with a snake in its beak sits on a tombstone and Darvell asks the narrator to bury him in the grave where the stork is sitting. When the narrator wonders why the stork does not eat the serpent, Darvell smiles and says: "It is not yet time." Shortly after this Darvell dies and the stork flies away. Although the narrator manages

---

<sup>46</sup> George Gordon, Lord Byron, *A Fragment* <<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/fragment.html>>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

to bury his body at the designated place but before that, Darvell's body mysteriously turns black in only an hour.

Although Polidori had the outline of the whole story as he mentions it in the introduction to his story *Ernestus Berchtold*, there are many questions about the fragment which will probably never be answered:

Two friends were to travel from England into Greece; while there one of them should die, but before his death, should obtain from his friend an oath of secrecy with regard to his decease. Some short time after, the remaining traveller returning to his native country, should be startled at perceiving his former companion moving about in society, and should be horrified at finding that he made love to his former friend's sister.<sup>47</sup>

Polidori's story starts from this basic narrative. There is the main character, an impressionable youth seeking the attention of an aloof and mysterious man with aristocratic background. The journey to south-eastern Europe also corresponds and the oath of not speaking about the companion's death as well.

Polidori adds much more psychology in his story and depicts a relationship of a young man called Aubrey, in this case in third person narrative, and the demonic Lord Ruthven who seems to be obsessed with torturing the youth to the point of madness. Lord Ruthven appears to be very similar to Darvell for he is a pale and distant aristocrat with a mysterious past and questionable reputation. Polidori also pays attention to his piercing grey eyes, a feature very distinctive in a traditional Gothic villain. Aubrey observes Ruthven's passion to deepen people's misery through charity such as giving money to a gambler just to make him play more and lose everything. He also mentions Ruthven's affairs with young innocent women whose reputation is ruined because of it. Polidori further elaborates on the vampiric nature of Lord Ruthven though it is not based on the traditional vampiric trait of blood sucking. Rather, Ruthven can be seen as a kind of vampire whose vitality depends on those he associates with. For example, when Aubrey is strong, Ruthven grows weak but when Aubrey is weak, Ruthven becomes strong. Towards the end of the story, Aubrey is sick and insane, whereas Ruthven is full of life and mentally vigorous.

Based on Polidori's outline, even though Darvell also comes back to life and courts the protagonist's sister, Polidori does not explain the timing of the journey (exactly one year from

---

<sup>47</sup> Twitchell, 106.



the supposed return from the dead), the ring, the mysterious stork nor the premature blackening of the body, which might be vital in comparing the two stories. In fact, it is never mentioned that Darvell is supposed to be a vampire, although there are supernatural powers at work and he seems to come back from the dead, and neither Byron nor Polidori ever mention that he is supposed to do so as a vampire.<sup>48</sup> In fact, as Ellis remarks, certain incident in Byron's life might have inspired him to write such a story. When Byron was bedridden in Patras with sickness in 1810, numerous of his close friends were convinced that they saw him walking around London.<sup>49</sup> Byron, with his tendency for superstition,<sup>50</sup> could have used such a mysterious event and write a supernatural story about it.

### **3.2 Polidori's Theft and Publication, and Byronic Celebrity as Vampirism**

As mentioned earlier, the outline of the story does not come from Polidori's own mind. Byron wrote his *Fragment* as his contribution to the famous 1816 ghost story competition and from Polidori's introduction to another of his novels, it is evidenced that Byron confided the whole story (or at least the most part of it) to him.

After its publication in *New Monthly Magazine*, *The Vampyre* appeared to be a success but it was not the amazing discovery of a new type of a villain nor the writing that made it so. Although Lord Byron was in disfavour with society after having gone into exile on the continent, his name still proved famous (or perhaps infamous) enough to sell, for it appears that it was the publisher Henry Colburn or Polidori himself who might have signed the whole text with "Lord B."<sup>51</sup> However, in his book *Byron in Geneva*, David Ellis opposes the second possibility simply because if Polidori had the desire to gain money from his acquaintance with Byron he could have done it by publishing his diary from the time of his service with the famous poet (also another argument could be that Polidori later denied he would publish the story in Byron's name), which leaves the publisher, Henry Colburn, as being the main suspect.<sup>52</sup> Apparently, Polidori later conceded that the outline was Byron's with Byron confirming this statement but admitting that the storytelling is Polidori's work.<sup>53</sup> Colburn later deleted the fake

---

<sup>48</sup> Twitchell, 114.

<sup>49</sup> David Ellis, *Byron in Geneva* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011) 49.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Twitchell, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Ellis, 49.

<sup>53</sup> Twitchell, 107.

authorship but only after the book became widely popular, which was probably only due to the fact that the laws applying to magazines were less strict than those applying to books.<sup>54</sup>

However, Lord Byron's association with *The Vampyre* does not stop with the case of plagiarism as the novel seems to have a lot of biographical details that show Polidori's attitude towards his former employer which probably added to the popularity of the novel. Aubrey describes the physical appearance of Lord Ruthven as a handsome man with a very pale complexion, "which never gained a warmer tint, either from the blush of modesty, or from the strong emotion of passion."<sup>55</sup> Byron himself was known to be a good-looking man of a very pale skin "which may have been a consequence of either a naturally thick skin or his dieting."<sup>56</sup> Aubrey is also aware of Lord Ruthven's past transgressions, or at least of rumours about them, just as Byron had plenty of scandals on his shoulders. Another major characteristic Polidori attributed to his vampire was Lord Ruthven's cold attitude and ostentatious disinterestedness. Aubrey finds himself fascinated with the man "entirely absorbed in himself, who gave few other signs of his observation of external objects."<sup>57</sup> As David Ellis mentions, Byron himself showed a certain degree of such a quality, associating it with Byron's aristocratic background or his past spent among the Regency dandies.<sup>58</sup>

While many people might have noticed the similarities between Lord Ruthven and Byron, there also seem to be some similarities between Aubrey and Polidori. Aubrey is a naïve and impressionable youth who seems to be charmed by the more experienced and famous aristocrat with whom he travels around Europe. Similarly, Polidori travelled around Europe as Byron's doctor, apparently idealizing himself to be a lover and artist.<sup>59</sup>

Another example of autobiographical features in the story is Polidori's description of the power struggle between the two characters. As Lord Ruthven grows stronger and stronger, Aubrey grows ever weaker. This polarity might have had roots in the reality as Polidori was probably the least athletic from the men of the whole group as the following example shows:

When Shelley, who himself was no athlete, beat Polidori in a boat race, Polidori grew so testy that he challenged Shelley to a duel – hardly a heroic gesture, as Polidori knew

---

<sup>54</sup> Twitchell, 107.

<sup>55</sup> John Polidori, *The Vampyre and Other Tales of the Macabre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 3.

<sup>56</sup> Ellis, 49.

<sup>57</sup> Polidori, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ellis, 50.

<sup>59</sup> Twitchell, 105.

that Shelley was a pacifist, at least in public. Shelley demurred, but Byron, who by this time was finding Polidori tedious, offered to fight in Shelley's stead.<sup>60</sup>

On the other hand, Byron was known to be a very athletic type despite his disability, be it in sports, shooting, or at the very least he was stronger than Polidori, as Byron pointed out when he counted all the things he was better at than Polidori (except poetry):

First... I can hit with a pistol the keyhole of that door – secondly, I can swim across the river to yonder point – and thirdly, I can give you a d-----d good thrashing.<sup>61</sup>

Polidori on many occasions felt inferior to his employer not only on the intellectual or artistic level (after all, Polidori was the youngest man who reached the medical degree at Edinburgh University,<sup>62</sup> therefore there is no doubt Polidori had high opinion of his intellectual capabilities) but also on the physical level. Considering how many autobiographical trivia there are to find in *The Vampyre* concerning Byron and Polidori, this incident shows yet another grudge Polidori held against his employer.

However, Polidori was not the only one who created his alter-ego in literature. Byron himself probably projected himself as many of his heroes. For example, many times, he added autobiographical features in his works<sup>63</sup> where the Byronic hero often follows the poet's perception of himself: an individualist who defies traditional morality, for one. As Thorslev explains:

Byron may in some sense have become his hero..., but his hero was no mere outgrowth of the poet's personality. Byron did not project life into literature nearly so much as he projected literature into life.<sup>64</sup>

Byron fell from grace because of his scandals (the scandal surrounding the divorce being the final stroke) and even rumours of incest with his half-sister Augusta Leigh. As already mentioned previously, in *The Giaour* the hero is seen as the liberator of Greece, something

---

<sup>60</sup> Twitchell, 106.

<sup>61</sup> Twitchell, 105.

<sup>62</sup> Twitchell, 104.

<sup>63</sup> Thorslev, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Thorslev, 12.

Byron very much wanted to be when he travelled to Greece to help in the fight against the Turkish rulers.

Byron's literary self, or as Jerome J. McGann calls it the Byron's ever evolving mask,<sup>65</sup> the Byronic hero, also influenced the character of the vampire through his *Fragment*. Byron may not have had the intention to make Darvell a vampire but from all the mysterious features in the story, it is safe to assume that Darvell definitely possessed certain supernatural abilities. After all, he probably planned the whole trip as they arrived at the Turkish cemetery (which he already knew) at the exact time they were supposed to. Also, the reader can see Darvell dead and decaying, and yet, according to Polidori's outline, he was meant to return from the dead. The last mysterious event appears to be the incident with the stork which remained unexplained.

On the other hand, Byron was not the only one who recreated himself in his works as the hero of the story. As James B. Twitchell describes in his book *The Living Dead*, Polidori, hired by Byron as a personal physician, saw himself as a lover and artist.<sup>66</sup> However, their relationship became strained over time as the young doctor "proved cantankerous, moody, petulant, and terribly jealous of his employer."<sup>67</sup> Concerning his view of himself as a lover, he ended up as the proverbial "third wheel" in the whole group that included the Shelleys, Byron and his lover Claire Clairmont. Regarding his literary skills during the night of the ghost stories, Mary Shelley (or possibly Percy Bysshe Shelley) wrote:

Poor Polidori had some terrible idea about a skull-headed lady, who was so punished for peeking through a keyhole – what to see I forget – something very shocking and wrong of course; but when she was reduced to a worse condition than the renowned Tom of Coventry, he did not know what to do with her, and was obliged to dispatch her to the tomb of the Capulets, the only place for which she was fitted.<sup>68</sup>

As evidenced by the incidents mentioned above, Polidori's presence in the group grew increasingly uncomfortable until he was dismissed from Byron's service as a physician, later having a less than pleasant meeting in Italy when Polidori was arrested for insulting an Austrian

---

<sup>65</sup> Jerome J. McGann, "Hero with a Thousand Masks: The Rhetoric of Byronism," *Studies in Romanticism* 31.3 (1992): 295-296, JSTOR < <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25600964>>, accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Twitchell, 105.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> "Introduction to the Third Edition of *Frankenstein*" in *ibid*.

officer at La Scala.<sup>69</sup> Through his connections, Byron managed to get him released but this only managed to anger the young doctor even more.<sup>70</sup>

From the accounts mentioned above, it seems evident that Polidori disliked his former employer strongly. Byron may have come up with the hero Darvell, but Polidori rewrote and recast Darvell into the fully demonic Lord Ruthven, whose very name also points at Byron even more directly. The name was used in association with Byron before by his former lover Lady Caroline Lamb,<sup>71</sup> a married Anglo-Irish aristocrat-turned-novelist who had an affair with Byron in 1812. In her Gothic novel *Glenarvon* published in 1816 by the very same Henry Colburn who also published *The Vampyre* under Byron's name, the corrupt Lord Ruthven seduces an innocent young woman, Calantha, and later leaves, an event that causes the young lady to die of grief. Apparently, Lady Caroline Lamb's satirical portrayal of many of her acquaintances caused Lord Byron certain uneasiness, which Polidori probably used in his quasi-biographical literary revenge.<sup>72</sup>

However, none of this would be possible if Lord Byron's celebrity was not so famous and infamous at the same time. As Clara Tuite says:

The Romantic period saw the birth of the literary celebrity, a figure distinguishable from the merely famous author by his or her status as a cultural commodity produced by highly-developed capitalist relations of production and consumption and a fully industrialized form of print capitalism.<sup>73</sup>

This new type of a famous author was enabled also by the fact that the literary market was expanding rapidly from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the relationship between the author and his audience changed dramatically from a small circle to a mass of anonymous readers.<sup>74</sup>

When the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published in 1812, Byron immediately gained immense popularity as a poet. However, as any celebrity, Byron did not escape numerous scandals. One of the first was the affair with Lady Caroline Lamb who was followed by others. As Tuite explains, this romance was one of the first "example of the genre of literary celebrity that is the author's love life."<sup>75</sup> The reason for this was also the fact that the

---

<sup>69</sup> Twitchell, 106.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Twitchell, 108.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Clara Tuite, "Tainted Love and Romantic 'Literary Celebrity,'" *ELH* 74.1 (2007): 62, JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/30029546>>, accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Tuite, 60.

romance (and the end of it) served also as a type of theatre for the readers. While Byron seemed comfortable with sharing her letters and proofs of love, after the affair ended Lamb reacted in the same manner and openly displayed her disenchantment with the famous poet.<sup>76</sup> What started with buttons inscribed with the words “do not trust Byron” in Latin continued in the form of the Gothic novel *Glenarvon*, which presented Lamb’s former lover in a very unflattering manner. Published in 1816, the novel became a scandal and probably because of that also a success as it was the genre of so-called “silverfork fiction”, which often served as a guide for middle class readers concerning fashion, gossip, etc, and *Glenarvon* even started the trend of so called “Byronic silverfork.”<sup>77</sup>

However, what is interesting about the publication is also the publisher himself: Henry Coldburn, the very same Henry Coldburn who published Polidori’s *The Vampyre* and may have been involved in signing the books as “Lord B.” As Judith Barbour describes him:

Coldburn was adept at blurring the boundaries between scandalous memoirs and fiction in ways that made an author’s private life and social position commodities which could be turned for profit.<sup>78</sup>

Therefore, there can be no doubt Coldburn was in the centre of fuelling Byron’s scandalous celebrity by creating and adding to the negative fame around him. His *New Monthly Magazine* apparently recommended *Glenarvon*, describing it as “a fearful beacon to warn the young and inexperienced against the danger of talents unsanctified by a sense of duty.”<sup>79</sup>

However, none of this considerably damaged Byron’s name which shows, as Tuite explains, that “Byron can impose his self-image even in the midst of defamation and to compel a kind of recognition all the stronger for being charged with an affective charge of ambivalence.”<sup>80</sup> In other words, Byron (and other people) could capitalize on his scandals and still retain his popularity through infamy. Therefore, Byron held a somewhat demonic image in the public eye and a novel such as *The Vampyre*, certainly added to or strengthened his reputation of a “Satanic Majesty.”<sup>81</sup> With this kind of notoriety, fitting in the devilish theme, it does not seem far-fetched to use the analogy of Byron’s celebrity as a vampiric one. After all, celebrity essentially feeds on and thrives on the ruin and disgrace of people’s reputation in order

---

<sup>76</sup> Tuite, 68-71.

<sup>77</sup> Tuite 71, 73.

<sup>78</sup> Tuite, 72.

<sup>79</sup> Tuite, 72-73.

<sup>80</sup> Tuite, 78.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

to keep their fame alive. The more scandalous and the longer the fall of everyone involved is, the faster the status of the celebrity grows. Aubrey mentions Lord Ruthven's scandalous affairs which usually involve young women who lost their reputation because of him. Similarly, Byron was infamous for his affairs and his failed marriage, which all involved a romantic interest, and just like his literary alter-ego in *The Vampyre*, while Byron could withstand and even strengthen his position in the public sphere, his "victims," including Lady Caroline Lamb, usually fell from grace.

## 4 *Lamia* and “La Belle Dame sans Merci”

### 4.1 *Lamia* versus the Original Mythology

While the male vampire's roots can be found in medieval folklore, the female vampire's origins run even further back in history to Greek mythology and the Talmud but, of course, same as her male counterpart, the evolution seems often unclear or overlapping with other phenomena. Greek mythology encyclopaedias usually describe Lamia as the daughter of the king of Egypt and Libya as well as Zeus' lover who was struck down by his jealous wife Hera to the underworld and turned into a monster who snatches babies from their mothers and drinks their blood, since Hera also killed all her children who were fathered by Zeus.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately, encyclopaedias are also very simplistic about their descriptions of Lamia and do not elaborate on her wider influence and evolution; thus, the Lamia that we know from Keats's poem of the same name differs quite significantly from ancient mythologies and one has to search further for the clues of her origins.

Other sources also present Lamia as Zeus' lover who was turned into a monster but also stress the fact that Lamia was not just one monster but a whole class of monsters of various characteristics and descriptions throughout Greek narratives. Daniel Ogden mentions the same myth and adds another detail, that of detachable eyes, which were the consequence of another curse Hera brought on Lamia: no sleep to relieve the pain. Zeus, to help his lover, then enabled her to remove her eyes.<sup>83</sup> This phenomenon is connected to another of Lamia's characteristics: her serpentine body (as snakes are known to be unable to close their eyes).<sup>84</sup>

Researching the *lamiae* is often difficult due to various accounts which differ in descriptions. In one narrative about the hero Coroebus, a monster is sent by Apollo to devour babies as a revenge for his dead lover who was executed and her son who was torn by dogs.<sup>85</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> century AD Roman poet Statius describes the monster as a woman with sharp claws and snake-like legs and with a single hissing snake's head growing in the middle out of her brows.<sup>86</sup> However, Statius does not name the monster and the term *lamia* appears only in the myth's later variations in the 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> century AD.<sup>87</sup> What connects the unnamed monster and “*lamia*,”

---

<sup>82</sup> Vojtěch Zamarovský, *Bohové a hrdinové antických bájí* (Praha: Mladá fronta, 1982) 260.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel Ogden, *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 91.

<sup>84</sup> Ogden, 91-92.

<sup>85</sup> Ogden, 87.

<sup>86</sup> Ogden, 88.

<sup>87</sup> Ogden, 87-88.



however, is the depiction of the scene on a Greek lekythos from 5<sup>th</sup> century BC which shows exactly the same creature as Statius described.<sup>88</sup>

Other authors continue in the mythic tradition of Lamia as a devourer of babies. Aristophanes in his plays presents a *lamia* as a foul-smelling creature which he describes quite eloquently, and graphically, as the smell of a seal, unwashed testicles or the anus of a camel. To this list Aristophanes also adds that a *lamia* apparently farts when captured.<sup>89</sup> In other narratives, *lamiae* are associated with young attractive men. For example, in one of them a young man is supposed to be sacrificed to a *lamia* but is eventually saved.<sup>90</sup> The Greek orator in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, Dio Chrysostom, mentions a *lamia* associated with Libya (as the original Lamia was the daughter of the king of Egypt and Libya) who eats young men, and describes them as creatures with claws and two heads, half hideous and serpentine, half beautiful and human.<sup>91</sup> Certainly, this version of Lamia would hardly charm any man, but of course, the myth of Lamia did not stay untouched for centuries. Female vampires (and Lamia) show some of the characteristics of a succubus, and Resnick and Kitchell Jr. agree that there has been a certain level of permeating of the Greek myth of Lamia and the Jewish myth of Lilith thanks to the similar traits they share: devouring men and babies.<sup>92</sup>

The mention of Lilith appears in Isaiah 34:14, stating that Lilith is a demon. However, with time, Lilith has been replaced in this passage by first an “ass-centaur” in the Greek Septuagint and in another, much later translation by Symmachus, the “ass-centaur” and Lilith are replaced by Lamia. The last translation then kept Lamia even in Latin translations, so the mention of Lilith disappeared.<sup>93</sup> First, it should be said who and what Lilith was in Hebrew mythology, to compare her to the Greek Lamia and recognize her influence on the modern Lamia. In the Babylonian Talmud,<sup>94</sup> Lilith is described as the first wife of Adam who refuses to become his inferior and lie beneath him. When Adam attempts to rape her, she flees Eden and gives birth to female and male demons: succubus and incubus (in some sources Lilith herself becomes a succubus).<sup>95</sup> Later she agrees to return only if God allows her to have power over male new-

---

<sup>88</sup> Ogden, 88.

<sup>89</sup> Ogden, 91.

<sup>90</sup> Ogden, 89.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Irvn M. Resnick and Kenneth F. Kitchell Jr., “‘The Sweepings of Lamia’: Transformations of the Myths of Lilith and Lamia”, *Religion, Gender, and Culture in the Pre-Modern World*, ed. Alexandra Cuffel and Brian Britt (New York: Plagrave Macmillan, 2007) 85.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Nancy Schumann, “Women with Bite: Tracing Vampire Women from Lilith to Twilight,” *The Universal Vampire: Origins and Evolution of a Legend*, ed. Barbara Brodman and James E. Doan (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, The Rowan & Littlefield Pub. Group, Inc., 2013) 112.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

borns until the eighth day (when they are circumcised) and female until the twentieth day. Despite the circumstances, she returns to Eden, and rapes Adam who is later terrorized by female demons who have intercourse with him in his sleep.<sup>96</sup>

The last and probably the most important account of the *lamia* can be found in the biographical work *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana* of the ancient Greek writer, Flavius Philostratus, a sophist living in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. In Book IV, chapter 25, Philostratus mentions a certain incident that served as the major source and inspiration to what later became the poem *Lamia*, however rather indirectly. Philostratus describes an incident when Lycian Menippus, a young and handsome philosopher with a bright mind, falls in love with a supposedly Phoenician woman who is thought to be rich. The woman stops him as he is walking towards home and claims to be in love with him and offers him a life of love and luxury in her house. Menippus, who has a weakness for such pleasures, agrees. One day his mentor and friend, Apollonius, tells him that he “cherishes a serpent” and inquires whether there will be a wedding and the young man answers him that perhaps the next day. At the wedding, the hall is decorated like a royal palace with gold and silver. Apollonius appears and uncovers the truth that the foreign woman is in fact a *lamia*, which angers the bride who tells him to be silent and slanders him and philosophers in general for the rest of the event. However, all her illusions, decorations, wine and servants disappear due to Apollonius’ rebukes and the *lamia* pretends to be crying and begs him to leave her be. Apollonius refuses to do so and finally she admits that she is a vampire and that she was fattening up Menippus to later eat his body as was her natural habit.

Philostratus’ story seems to be quite simple where Apollonius (who is after all the centre of the whole work) helps his young and misguided friend Menippus escape from the claws of an evil *lamia*. Just as Apollonius serves as the hero of the story, the *lamia* acts as the villain and eventually confesses her intention with the emphasis on the fact that eating young men is her nature and there was certainly no tender feeling behind her scheme. However, it was not this version of the story that inspired Keats to write his poem.<sup>97</sup> It was a retelling of the story by a 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century English scholar at Oxford, Robert Burton, in his best-known work called *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, where he focuses on the various causes of depression from medical and philosophical points of view. In the book he also mentions Philostratus and his story:

---

<sup>96</sup> Resnick and Kitchell Jr., 85.

<sup>97</sup> Twitchell, 49.

...in his fourth book *de vita Apollonii*, hath a memorable instance in this kind, which I may not omit, of one Menippus Lycius, a young man twenty-five years of age, that going between Cenchreas and Corinth, met such a phantasm in the habit of a fair gentlewoman, which taking him by the hand, carried him home to her house in the suburbs of Corinth, and told him she was a Phoenician by birth, and if he would tarry with her, he should hear her sing and play, and drink such wine as never any drank, and no man should molest him; but she being fair and lovely would live and die with him, that was fair and lovely to behold. The young man a philosopher, otherwise staid and discreet, able to moderate his passions, though not this of love, tarried with her awhile to his great content, and at last married her, to whose wedding, amongst other guests, came Apollonius, who, by some probable conjectures, found her out to be a serpent, a *lamia*, and that all her furniture was like Tantalus's gold described by Homer, no substance, but mere illusions. When she saw herself descried, she wept, and desired Apollonius to be silent, but he would not be moved, and thereupon she, plate, house, and all that was in it, vanished in an instant: many thousands took notice of this fact, for it was done in the midst of Greece.<sup>98</sup>

This retelling of the story seems to be much closer to Keats's poem. Although the core of the plot is the same, the character of the *lamia* is moved towards a much more positive depiction. In Burton's version the *lamia* no longer pretends to weep; instead, she actually does weep and there is no confession at the end that the *lamia* wants to eat the youth and was just fattening Menippus for that purpose – already a leap of sensibility from the Greek original, factoring in a plea for mercy from the creature.

In the overview of the development of the *lamia* (or a monster that probably were *lamia* by description) we have seen her moving from a 5<sup>th</sup> century BC accounts of either baby-snatching creature on the Greek lekythos, which was later in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD described in the same manner, and Aristophanes' foul-smelling hermaphrodite to Dio Chrysostom's half beautiful and half monstrous man eater, and finally to Philostratus' beautiful seductress usually referred to as an "apparition." From a monster to a supernatural woman, Burton further continues in this trend and polishes the image of the *lamia* by depicting her pleading for mercy from Apollonius.

---

<sup>98</sup> John Keats, *Complete Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982) 359.

It is true that Burton's take on the story appears rather simplistic, but perhaps that allowed Keats to reinvent it in his poem. One can understand the story allegorically, as a cautionary tale, in which Lamia represents the imagination and fantasy, Lycius the artist and Apollonius reason and logic. While the artist should not surrender to the imagination completely, the lack of it causes his death. However, if one focuses on the character of Lamia versus the male characters, there seem to be also a struggle of conventions.

Right from the beginning Keats's Lamia shows a certain degree of calculation, revealing the information about the invisible nymph and so enabling Hermes to find her against her wishes. However, as she gains her human form the transformation she undergoes is described in vivid and slightly uncomfortable details, which shows how torturous the experience is for her and at the same time how much she is willing to go through it to be with her love. As the story unfolds, the polarizations of the characters develop even further and while Lamia loves Lycius without any reservations, although she still lies about her origins and in fact never reveals them, it is the male characters that appear to become the dominating forces around her. While Lamia seems to be content with the way things are, it is Lycius who forces her to marry him and it should be pointed out that unlike the previous versions, where Apollonius presses Lycius, it is Lycius who first starts pressing Lamia into marriage.

Apollonius himself undergoes a certain transformation as well. While Philostratus' Apollonius, the hero of his work, serves as a wise man who saves the fallible youth from the claws of a monster, Keats's Apollonius appears to be more sinister: a cold and unfriendly philosopher, with Keats even bursting into a sharp criticism of Apollonius and philosophy itself:

...and, for the sage,  
Let spear-grass and the spiteful thistle wage  
War on his temples. Do not all charms fly  
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?  
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:  
We know her woof, her texture; she is given  
In the dull catalogue of common things.  
Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings,  
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,  
Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine—  
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made  
The tender-person'd Lamia melt into a shade. (PII 228-238)

This part of the poem refers to Keats's theory of negative capability where he argues that: "a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason."<sup>99</sup> In other words, unlike scientists, poets should be able to create beyond knowledge and thus express their imagination instead pursuing so-called facts.

Apollonius' friendship is further questionable also because of the ending itself, which Keats reinvented by adding the death of Lycius, as it seems that Apollonius does not care about his pupil's life and is more concerned with the destruction of Lamia. The last line of the quotation also fully shows the evolution of the depiction of *lamia* from flesh-eating monster of the Greek myths to the 'tender-person'd Lamia' of Keats's poem – a significant aesthetic shift.

The ending of the poem follows more closely with Burton's version where Lamia does not reveal her true identity and does not reveal any evil intentions. She does not pretend to cry and her sorrow in this manner appears to be genuine. Therefore, Keats describes his Lamia in a more favourable light (although not completely, since there are incidents of her betraying the nymph or using magic over Lycius to shut him off in the palace while concealing her true identity), as the opposite of the cold-hearted philosopher Apollonius and the vain Lycius who seems to be easily influenced by the conventions of society.

## 4.2 Abjection, Gender, Sexuality, and Female Agency

The seductive aspect of a female vampire seems to be present from the very beginning, be it in the form of a *lamia* or Lilith as the phantom (and evil) seductresses. In *The Universal Vampire* Angela Tumini notes that "the question of sexism and gender became entrenched in vampirism because of the misogynist tradition long rooted in the belief that 'the devil prevailed first with Eve and continues to find easy marks in women.'"<sup>100</sup>

Even one of the first Romantic female vampires is associated with seduction. Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *The Bride of Corinth* (*Die Braut von Korinth*, 1797) is based on an only partially preserved story by the Greek writer Phlegon of Tralles, about a girl called Philinnion, who dies in the city of Amphipolis very early after her marriage. A few months after her death, a young man, Machates, comes to her house as a guest. Due to the missing pieces of the story,

---

<sup>99</sup> Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21<sup>st</sup> December 1817, in *Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hugh l'Ansou Fausset (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1970) 81.

<sup>100</sup> Angela Tumini, "Vampiresse: Embodiment of Sensuality and Erotic Horror in Carl Th. Dreyer's *Vampyr* and Mario Bava's *The Mask of Satan*," *The Universal Vampire: Origins and Evolution of a Legend*, 123.

the beginning seems very unclear; however, at night Philinnion visits Machates and the couple spends the night together after which she gives him a golden ring and he gives her an iron ring and a cup. The same events take place the following night but Philinnion's old nursemaid hears them and sees the presumably dead girl alive in the guest's room and shares the information with the parents. When they disclose the truth to Machates, he agrees to their plan to surprise the girl the following night, and although their plan works, Philinnion becomes upset and reproaches her parents for not letting her spend the third night with her lover for now she will have to return to the place where she came from, "...because I have not returned against the will of God."<sup>101</sup>

In *The Bride of Corinth*, Goethe alters the story as follows: A young Athenian man arrives in Corinth to marry a girl to whom he has been betrothed since they were children. As the mother welcomes him into their home, he goes to sleep when suddenly a young pale woman appears at his door. First slightly surprised by his presence, she spends the night with him and drinks his blood as well as giving him a golden chain while refusing his silver cup as a gift. Suddenly the mother passes by the door and hears whispering, bursts into the door and catches the sight of her daughter. The young woman reproaches her mother for interrupting her and reveals the truth that she drinks blood from young men, and eventually asks her mother to burn her body on a pyre. Goethe also adds another religious aspect to the poem as the young Athenian claims to be pagan and the young woman's family is Christian. The two religions collide, and Christianity is described as something suffocating and limiting while it is the pagan religion that has the power of keeping vows and destroying the undead.

Braccini does not consider the story about Philinnion a vampire story, as there are numerous signs of her coming back as a living person – there are no physical alterations, such as pallor, a zombie-like way of walking, and she seem to return with good intentions (and not against the will of God) as she claims that she was looking for love that she has never known.<sup>102</sup> Even though Goethe was inspired by this story to write his *Bride of Corinth*, his inspiration was indirect through the 17<sup>th</sup> century German writer and historian Johann Praetorius' who wrote a collection of ghost stories called *Anthropodemus plutonicus*.<sup>103</sup> In Goethe's version the bride differs from Philinnion significantly both in physical appearance and in character. She is described as pale and her behaviour is that of a seductress but for radically different reasons from Philinnion, for while Philinnion is searching for love she has never known, in Goethe's

---

<sup>101</sup> Braccini, 34-35.

<sup>102</sup> Braccini, 37.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

poem the bride confesses that she came back to draw blood from the heart of her intended bridegroom and intends to do the same to other young men. Suddenly, we have a blood-thirsty demon who seduces young men and sucks the blood out of their hearts to sustain herself, an archetype very similar to that of Lilith and the succubi, creatures who have intercourse with sleeping men and draw their energy or blood.

In *The Universal Vampire*, Angela Tumini shows a list of characteristics of the female vampire which are not usually desirable in mortal women, such as physical strength, inability to give birth and absence of remorse,<sup>104</sup> and Susanne Kord elaborates on the idea of parenthood which makes the female vampire as the opposite of a woman ideal for the patriarchal society:

The female vampire is the antithesis of motherhood: she does not feed her offspring but feeds from it; she does not give life but un-death. At the same time, she offers an analogy to *fatherhood*: like a man she can produce as many offspring as she wants, for as long as she wants. Her parenthood is absolute, that is: independent of a partner; like the male vampire (but unlike men), she has gained reproductive omnipotence.<sup>105</sup>

Obviously, the masculine traits in a female character (or even traits surpassing masculinity) are undesirable to patriarchal society and as such the female vampire poses a threat to the system even greater than the male vampire:

The male vampire is dangerous in terms of literal destructive potential, in women the consequences reach beyond murder and property damage to spark fears about the collapse of social order itself.<sup>106</sup>

In other words, while the male vampire threatens the order as a predator, often seducing innocent women, the danger comes from a criminal that abuses his victim who has no agency in the matter and simply becomes a passive symbol of the vampire's depravity and corruption. However, a female vampire may influence the whole society by bringing certain power to the female characters they did not possess before and might in fact show certain characteristics undesirable for the traditional patriarchal concept of an ideal woman such as strength, open

---

<sup>104</sup> Tumini, 123.

<sup>105</sup> Susanne Kord in *The Universal Vampire: Origins and Evolution of a Legend*, 123-124.

<sup>106</sup> Tumini, 124.

sexuality and agency, not to mention that a female vampire preys on men and therefore makes them passive victims, thus emasculating them.<sup>107</sup>

Keats's poem *Lamia* presents a similar concept as for example Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, where a woman with a supernatural background or abilities falls in love with a mortal and seeks the help of a god or a witch to gain human form only to lose the man she fell in love with in the end. *Lamia* starts from a similar premise but continues in a different manner. Lamia, transformed into a serpent, falls in love with Lycius in her spirit form, which is one of her supernatural abilities, and begs the god Hermes to give her a human form in exchange for the secret where his beloved nymph is hidden. Hermes agrees and Lamia undergoes a very torturous transformation and eventually stops Lycius on the road. Lycius immediately falls in love with her and agrees to live with her in Corinth. However, their romance is kept secret and Lycius seems to be very anxious about it. One day, Lycius persuades Lamia to get married, with which she reluctantly agrees. On their wedding day, the uninvited philosopher, Lycius' mentor Apollonius, uncovers Lamia's nature after which she disappears and Lycius dies.

Considering Lamia's transgressive position in the story, the reader knows she is a woman of certain supernatural abilities. She can travel in her spirit form anywhere she wants, even between the realms of gods and mortals. She helps the nymph who desired to get rid of unwanted attention, to become invisible and, therefore, hidden from Hermes' sight, later betraying her. She seems to have certain power over mortals, as Lycius appears to be almost entranced when he meets her on the road to Corinth. She can also use magic and illusions to decorate their house on the day of their wedding. Lamia is also a woman of power in a different sense. She can negotiate with Hermes, a god, and succeed in getting what she wants. She also takes initiative in her pursue of her beloved Lycius, as she chooses him and actively follows him in her spirit form around the country to eventually stop him on the road to Corinth where she knew he would be. In the beginning of their romance, Lamia is the hunter and Lycius is the hunted. Her strong-mindedness is very apparent at their very first meeting. Lycius imagines their life together out in the wilderness, to which Lamia answers:

...“If I should stay,”

Said Lamia, “here, upon this floor of clay,

“And pain my steps upon these flowers too rough,

---

<sup>107</sup> Tumini, 124.



“What canst thou say or do of charm enough  
 “To dull the nice remembrance of my home?  
 “Thou canst not ask me with thee here to roam  
 “Over these hills and vales, where no joy is,—  
 “Empty of immortality and bliss!  
 “Thou art a scholar, Lycius, and must know  
 “That finer spirits cannot breathe below  
 “In human climes, and live: Alas! poor youth,  
 “What taste of purer air hast thou to soothe  
 “My essence? What serener palaces,  
 “Where I may all my many senses please,  
 “And by mysterious sleights a hundred thirsts appease?  
 “It cannot be—Adieu!....” (PI 271-286)

It is evident that Lamia is the dominant one at the beginning, to the point of refusing Lycius’ naïve vision, and makes him beg for her return.

While Lamia may be the dominant, she also has to sacrifice a lot for her love. Right at the beginning her transformation from her serpentine form is not pleasant at all:

Left to herself, the serpent now began  
 To change; her elfin blood in madness ran,  
 Her mouth foam’d, and the grass, therewith besprent,  
 Wither’d at dew so sweet and virulent;  
 Her eyes in torture fix’d, and anguish drear,  
 Hot, glaz’d, and wide, with lid-lashes all sear,  
 Flash’d phosphor and sharp sparks, without one cooling tear.  
 The colours all inflam’d throughout her train,  
 She writh’d about, convuls’d with scarlet pain:  
 A deep volcanian yellow took the place  
 Of all her milder-mooned body’s grace;  
 And, as the lava ravishes the mead,  
 Spoilt all her silver mail, and golden brede;  
 Made gloom of all her frecklings, streaks and bars,  
 Eclips’d her crescents, and lick’d up her stars:

So that, in moments few, she was undrest  
Of all her sapphires, greens, and amethyst,  
And rubious-argent: of all these bereft,  
Nothing but pain and ugliness were left. (PI 146-164)

In the quotation we are presented with the wonderful imaginative and entrancing power of the description of the transformation which drastically contrasts with the previous description of Lamia's breath-takingly colourful serpentine body covered with all kinds of beautiful shapes and patterns. During her transformation, the beauty of her body suddenly changes into a description of the torturous experience full of 'pain and ugliness'.

In addition to losing her crown in order not to scare Lycius away she later diminishes in power and becomes a mortal woman for him:

Thus gentle Lamia judg'd, and judg'd aright,  
That Lycius could not love in half a fright,  
So threw the goddess off, and won his heart  
More pleasantly by playing woman's part,  
With no more awe than what her beauty gave,  
That, while it smote, still guaranteed to save. (PI 334-339)

On the other hand, Lycius does not show such devotion in return. He seems to be afraid to be seen with her in public, he tries to avoid his friends, and especially his mentor Apollonius. Already, there is a certain power polarity between the couple – Lamia may be calculating but she gives up many things for a man who appears to be afraid to publicly confess their relationship.

The roles of the partners change in Part II when the two lovers lie together in their house and Lycius hears a trumpet outside which reminds him of the real world of mortals and their laws, where living with a woman while unmarried is a sin. Lycius, previously ashamed for his romantic relationship with Lamia, suddenly changes his position from submissive to dominant and with it changes also his attitude towards his lover. It seems that Lycius suddenly switches to the traditional gender roles to the point that he refers to Lamia as a "prize" which should be showed off in front of other people to let his "foes choke" and friends "shout afar." Such language is fitting to use about an object rather than a person, let alone a partner. Lamia attempts to change his mind in vain:

...The lady's cheek  
 Trembled; she nothing said, but, pale and meek,  
 Arose and knelt before him, wept a rain  
 Of sorrows at his words; at last with pain  
 Beseeching him, the while his hand she wrung,  
 To change his purpose. He thereat was stung,  
 Perverse, with stronger fancy to reclaim  
 Her wild and timid nature to his aim:  
 Besides, for all his love, in self despite,  
 Against his better self, he took delight  
 Luxurious in her sorrows, soft and new.  
 His passion, cruel grown, took on a hue  
 Fierce and sanguineous as 'twas possible  
 In one whose brow had no dark veins to swell.  
 Fine was the mitigated fury, like  
 Apollo's presence when in act to strike  
 The serpent—Ha, the serpent! certes, she  
 Was none. She burnt, she lov'd the tyranny,  
 And, all subdued, consented to the hour  
 When to the bridal he should lead his paramour. (PII 64-83)

Lycius suddenly changes into an abusive partner who even enjoys torturing Lamia and subduing her to his will, thereby becoming the dominant party, stripping her of her personal autonomy. His newly gained dominant position in the relationship is emphasised during the wedding where he sits in the main seat and, in spite Lamia's request, grants admittance to Apollonius, originally uninvited due to her pleading. If the character of Lycius slowly turns into the patriarchal authority trying to dominate a "sinful" woman who wants to live outside the traditional system by marrying her against her will, Apollonius stands out even more as the arbiter of traditional morality. Right from the beginning, he recognizes the serpentine nature of Lamia and determines to reveal her 'true nature', possibly to save Lycius from her power, yet he does not seem to mind Lycius's objections against his actions. Lamia may not be completely without blame, especially concerning the nymph and her manner of pursuing Lycius; however, her desire to live without limitations dictated by patriarchal society, that a man and a woman

should be married or else live in sin, is confronted by two male characters, Lycius and Apollonius, where one wants to subdue her and the other wants to destroy her. Lamia, therefore, may have vampirism in her name, however Apollonius and Lycius betray vampirism in their actions. Apollonius hunts down his prey with no remorse and Lycius takes over Lamia's will and agency and becomes a tyrant while depending on her so strongly that he withers and dies without her, his source of life force which he loves and abuses at the same time.

### 4.3 "La Belle Dame sans Merci"

Keats seems to side with Lamia, considering his critical stance towards Apollonius yet another of his female vampiric characters, "La Belle Dame sans Merci", carries a lot of similar characteristics, emphasised in a more sinister manner. In the ballad, a dying knight recounts his affair with a beautiful lady who loved him and when he fell asleep the pale kings and princes warn him that he has become the lady's slave, after which the knight wakes up alone and disconsolate, potentially moribund, trapped 'palely loitering' in a wasteland.

There are several references in *Lamia* which point at the similarity between the themes of the poems. While Lamia asks Lycius when she first meets him in person: "And will you leave me on the hills alone?", the knight in "La Belle Dame sans Merci" repeatedly refers to dreaming, eventually waking up on "the cold hill's side." Besides being connected to Circe and her powers of entrapment and enthrallment, the two ladies have several commonalities; both have supernatural backgrounds, come across as the more powerful and dominant lovers, and are referred to as "wild" at some point, and both are seen as destructive lovers who sustain their partners to later kill them, however indirectly. While Lamia is only suspected to be such a vampire, *la belle dame* seems to be further away from any redeeming qualities of which Lamia has plenty. Furthermore, the core of the story sounds very familiar as both plots involve a vampiric woman in name or in nature who seduces a man to later leave him to languish or die. Neither of the abandonment is voluntary, though, as both women are expelled by another power, usually male, who reminds the lover how much she transgressed traditional morality. While Apollonius forces Lamia to disappear, the pale kings and princes presumably defy *la belle dame*'s power and warn the knight telling him she enslaved him, after which the knight awakes alone with the lady nowhere to be found. However, we have no proof of whether what they say is true because throughout the poem we only hear the knight's account of events, as the lady is not given a voice other than that she spoke to the knight in a 'language strange' in which he

simply assumes she told him that she loved him, which may not be the case at all. Both women also can be understood, as Kord explains, as nurturing mothers who do not bring life but only death or un-death, which is certainly true in the case of “La Belle Dame sans Merci”, and partially or indirectly in the case of *Lamia*.

Keats’s attitude towards female characters such as Lamia or *la belle dame* can be traced to his own experience with his fiancée Fanny Brawne. There are those who hold the opinion one should not regard the letters of Fanny Brawne as having any bearing on Keats’s poetry, as this explanation would be too simplistic,<sup>108</sup> but to dismiss Fanny’s strong influence over the author may seem a serious mistake given that there are many similarities between his emotions towards her that he expressed in the letters and the vampiric women he uses in his narratives. Certainly, it cannot be said that *la belle dame* and Lamia are modelled solely on Fanny, but it would be worth to consider her influence on them.

Probably the most intimate confession of Keats’s emotions can be found in his many letters to Fanny Brawne herself, in which he often describes her as a woman of unreachable quality or almost fantasizes about her in terms of more than a human woman:

I have been reading lately an oriental tale of a very beautiful color – It is of a city of melancholy men, all made so by this circumstance. Through a series of adventures each one of them by turns reach[es] some gardens of Paradise where they meet with a most enchanting Lady; and just as they are going to embrace her, she bids them shut their eyes – they shut them – and on opening their eyes again find themselves descending to the earth in a magic basket. The remembrance of this Lady and their delights lost beyond all recovery render them melancholy ever after. How I applied this to you, my dear; how I palpitated at it; how the certainty that you were in the same world with myself, and though as beautiful, not so talismanic as the Lady; how I could not bear you should be so you must believe because I swear it by yourself.<sup>109</sup>

Nevertheless, what also strikes very close to what *la belle dame* and possibly Lamia represent is his letter to Fanny where he describes the connection between love and death:

You absorb me in spite of myself – you alone: for I look not forward with any pleasure to what is call’d being settled in the world; I tremble at domestic cares – yet for you I

---

<sup>108</sup> Twitchell, 55.

<sup>109</sup> Letter to Fanny Brawne, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1819, in *Letters of John Keats*, 299-300.

would meet them, though if it would leave you the happier I would rather die than do so. I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your Loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute. I hate the world: it batters too much the wings of my self-will, and would I could take a sweet poison from your lips to send me out of it.<sup>110</sup>

Keats's attitude towards his fiancée involves descriptions of an unreachable woman of great beauty and power, in fact more powerful than him, whose love and beauty he closely associates with death. These can also be applied to *la belle dame* and Lamia, both women of beauty and power whose love is, in this case literally, deadly.

However, beyond his adoration and love for her there is a certain overwhelming feeling of imprisonment by such an omnipresent woman when he writes: "Ask yourself my love whether you are not very cruel to have so entrammelled me, so destroyed my freedom."<sup>111</sup> Finally, beyond loveliness and beauty there is a hint of a sinister woman, which continues in many forms in Keats's letters. There is no doubt about his strong feelings and admiration for her as many of his letters show. However, his love and devotion sometimes reach to their darker territories of dependency and jealousy. For example, Keats expressed his devotion and love in many of his letters but required the same level of passion from Fanny as well:

I shall be selfish enough to send it though I know it may give you a little pain, because I wish you to see how unhappy I am for love of you, and endeavour as much as I can to entice you to give up your whole heart to me whose whole existence hangs upon you. You could not step or move an eyelid but it would shoot to my heart - I am greedy of you. Do not think of any thing but me.<sup>112</sup>

Keats's jealousy surfaces in his letters more often and likely stems from the fact the two lovers were often separated by either his illness or other circumstances. His later isolation from her and the society probably even strengthened his desperation and loneliness. On the other hand, Fanny appeared to be one who enjoyed company of many people and men. Keats often expressed his distaste with her and society as a whole: "I am sickened at the brute world which

---

<sup>110</sup> Letter to Fanny Brawne, 25<sup>th</sup> July 1819, in *Letters of John Keats*, 303.

<sup>111</sup> Letter to Fanny Brawne, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1819, in *Letters of John Keats*. 289.

<sup>112</sup> Letter to Fanny Brawne, May 1820, in *Letters of John Keats*, 387-388.

you are smiling with. I hate men and women more.”<sup>113</sup> In other letters, Keats’s attitude towards her character becomes even more jealous and moralistic:

You may have altered – if you have not – if you still behave in dancing rooms and other societies as I have seen you – I do not want to live – if you have done so I wish this coming night may be my last. I cannot live without you, and not only you but *chaste you; virtuous you*. The Sun rises and sets, the day passes, and you follow the bent of your inclination to a certain extent – you have no conception of the quantity of miserable feeling that passes through me in a day. – Be serious! Love is not a plaything – and again do not write unless you can do it without a crystal conscience.<sup>114</sup>

In this letter, Keats yet again blames Fanny for her behaviour which makes him jealous but at the same time re-imagines her as her more chaste self, something he saw himself as not part of her character. Obviously, Keats has certain issues with Fanny’s sociable agency and even sexuality, regarding them as negative features that appear in his female vampires as well. In the final example, Keats not only expresses his objections to Fanny’s lifestyle but poses himself as the tortured one, as the victim, of her almost malicious actions:

You are to me an object intensely desirable – the air I breathe in a room empty of you is unhealthy. I am not the same to you – no – you can wait – you have a thousand activities – you can be happy without me. Any party, any thing to fill up the day has been enough. How have you pass’d this month? Who have you smil’d with? All this may seem savage in me. You do not feel as I do – you do not know what it is to love – one day you may – your time is not come. Ask yourself how many unhappy hours Keats has caused you in Loneliness. For myself I have been a Martyr the whole time, and for this reason I speak; the confession is forc’d from me by the torture.<sup>115</sup>

Of course, this thesis is not trying to argue that the characters of *la belle dame* and possibly Lamia are based solely on Fanny Brawne, a theory many critics dismissed many times. Instead it proposes to take Fanny’s influence into consideration, especially since there are similarities between Keats’s female vampires and his accounts in the letters. In both cases we have powerful

---

<sup>113</sup> Letter to Fanny Brawne, August 1820?, in *Letters of John Keats*, 402.

<sup>114</sup> Letter to Fanny Brawne, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1820, in *Letters of John Keats*, 395.

<sup>115</sup> Letter to Fanny Brawne, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1820, in *Letters of John Keats*, 394-395.

and beautiful women in whose presence, however, the man feels trapped either in a palace or in the “elfin grot,” which might also carry certain sexual connotations. In both cases these women bring death either actively or indirectly and, in both cases, their female agency and sexuality is seen as something transgressive for which they have to be destroyed. Similarly, Keats compares Fanny to a supernatural woman and further writes about feeling trapped by her. From his own strong feelings of devotion and adoration, Keats expresses the need of equally passionate feelings from Fanny; however, out of frustration, he later frequently succumbs to depths of jealousy which comes hand in hand with the distaste for the “immoral” behaviour of his fiancée. The general issue seems to lie in Keats’s perceived image of Fanny, a virtuous saint, colliding with her actual personality and being in the world.

Keats’s female vampires are not as literal as Polidori’s or Coleridge’s, for there are no mentions of bloodsucking; what does appear, however, are instances of life-energy dependency. Lamia’s name literally translates as “vampire”, but it is Lycius and Apollonius who act more like predators and tyrants, and it is specifically Lycius whose life depends on Lamia’s presence. In general, *Lamia* transcends Keats’s moral universe because she represents pure imagination, which can be dangerous, but at the same time the poet cannot exist without it. Her ruthless opponent, Apollonius, represents the limited and destructive world of logic and rationality, and his only purpose is to destroy imagination with all the beauty and pleasure that it brings, thus also killing poetry itself. While Lamia seems to be close to the poet’s heart, *la belle dame* stands as the silent figure in the background, for the only speakers in the poem are the introductory interlocutor and the knight whose account may or may not be the same as the lady’s. “La Belle Dame sans Merci” also does not describe a blood bond between a vampire and his victim but rather an energy or life-force dependency of the knight on the lady. Other interpretations may also associate *la belle dame* with drugs, disease, curse or spell that suck the life out of the knight.



## 5 *Christabel*

### 5.1 Fragmentation of the Vampire and Fragmentation as a Symbol of the Vampire

In the same way as the male vampire, the female vampire archetypes are found in an array of various sources, mythological, folklore, quasi-historical or anthropological, and fictional. As described in the previous chapters the female vampire's origins go further back to the Greek mythology where the term "lamia" referred to either one specific monster or a whole class of creatures. Although there are certain myths that seem to keep to the original (for example, the legend of Coroebus of Argos whose heroic act of slaying a *lamia* was preserved on a lekythos from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC through Callimachus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, to Pausanias' account in the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD), the issue with the *lamia* legend is the nonuniformity due to the various accounts that describe the creature differently. Pausanias presents a woman with serpents for legs and a snake's head in the middle of her brow, known for devouring children which was later named as a "lamia". Dio Chrysostom describes a double-headed monster half woman and half serpent who seduces young men with her human half and devours them with her serpentine part. Other accounts present a woman called Lamia who is punished by Hero to become a child-eating monster after having an affair with Zeus. Philostratus tells a story that later indirectly inspired Keats's *Lamia*, but his creature is a beautiful phantom woman and monster with the appearance of a woman who confesses to fattening up her victim before eating Menippus. In yet another account, Aristophanes, presents a distinct version of a *lamia* as a foul-smelling ugly monster who devours children. All these accounts differ significantly, not to mention that the term "lamia" itself could have been confused with other terms such as "empousa" that Plutarch "seemingly identifies... with poiné,"<sup>116</sup> a personified spirit of vengeance, and is mentioned as a synonym for "lamia" in Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*.

What we have, then, is a collage of different narratives and different depictions of the monster which finally emerged as a beautiful seductress, albeit with the help of other phenomena. As mentioned in previous chapters, Lamia started blending with Lilith when the original Lilith was gradually replaced by Lamia due to the similarity of their characteristics. The originally serpentine Lamia gains more from Lilith who creates her "children" with vampiric characteristics such as their ability of extracting energy from their victim during intercourse. Of course, the idea of the evil woman prevailed in Christianity as well, as Tumini

---

<sup>116</sup> Ogden, 90.

points out that the topics of sexism and vampirism are closely associated. It is, then, a question whether the serpentine form of the *lamia* might have been connected to the Judeo-Christian idea of Eve as the sinful woman seduced by a serpent. Regardless of the answer to that question, it is clear from the textual evidence that the character of the female vampire underwent major changes throughout tradition and time. Originally a serpentine child-eating monster, later influenced by the seductive apocryphal demoness Lilith and her kin, the female vampire arrives into Romanticism as a phantom lover made of fragments of her past incarnations, because with the name of the Greek monster (as *lamia* was a general term for a female vampire at that time)<sup>117</sup> and the description of a demonic woman who sucks blood from her male victim like Lilith, the female vampire emerges in Romanticism as a mixture of the pieces and continues further mostly influenced by Coleridge's *Geraldine*, undergoes a significant Romantic rewriting of the classical *lamia* in Keats's poem, and is later developed in LeFanu's *Carmilla*.

Concerning the poem itself, in spite of its fragmentary nature it differs from *The Giaour* in the sense that while Byron's poem was intended to be created out of fragments, *Christabel* happens to be the accidental fragment, for the poem was left unfinished unintentionally. To find out why Coleridge hesitated to finish it, one should start with what he might have intended the ending to be. In *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, James Gillman, Coleridge's biographer and friend, mentions the plot of the unfinished poem as such:

Over the mountains, the Bard, as directed by Sir Leoline, "hastes" with his disciple; but in consequence of one of those inundations supposed to be common to this country, the spot only where the castle once stood is discovered, the edifice itself being washed away. He determines to return. Geraldine being acquainted with all that is passing, like the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, vanishes. Re-appearing, however, she waits the return of the Bard, exciting in the mean time by her wily arts, all the anger she could rouse in the Baron's breast, as well as that jealousy of which he is described to have been susceptible. The old Bard and the youth at length arrive, and therefore she can no longer personate the character of Geraldine, the daughter of Lord Roland de Vaux, but changes her appearance to that of the accepted though absent lover of Christabel. Next ensues a courtship most distressing to Christabel, who feels — she knows not why — great disgust for her once favoured knight. This coldness is very painful to the Baron, who has no more conception than herself of the supernatural transformation. She at last yields

---

<sup>117</sup> Twitchell, 40.

to her father's entreaties, and consents to approach the altar with this hated suitor. The real lover returning, enters at this moment, and produces the ring which she had once given him in sign of her betrothment. Thus defeated, the supernatural being Geraldine disappears. As predicted, the castle bell tolls, the mother's voice is heard, and to the exceeding great joy of the parties, the rightful marriage takes place, after which follows a reconciliation and explanation between the father and daughter.<sup>118</sup>

Of course, there have been disputes as to whether Gillman's version is authentic. For example, William Wordsworth claimed in 1838 that Coleridge did not have any plan for the ending, but this statement is problematic, for in his work, "Coleridge's Plan for Completing 'Christabel'", B. R. Elderry, Jr. offers numerous counterarguments against Wordsworth claim.<sup>119</sup> Concerning Wordsworth's statement, Elderry, Jr. argues that due to the two poets' quarrel in 1810, Wordsworth may not have had enough information about Coleridge's plan while making that claim in 1838.<sup>120</sup> On the other hand there are several hints that can point at the conclusion that Coleridge indeed had a plan in mind. For example, Elderry, Jr. points out that Byron confirms Coleridge's words in the *Preface to Christabel* in 1816 about his plan for the ending and also mentions Coleridge's intentions to publish the poem in the years 1800 and 1801.<sup>121</sup> Elderry, Jr. further proposes to consider it as genuine since he finds it very fitting into the poet's style. First the general theme of the poem would be very characteristic by using "the moral implications of the action as a structural element,"<sup>122</sup> same as in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and Gillman himself claims that "the story of the *Christabel* is partly founded on the notion, that the virtuous of this world save the wicked."<sup>123</sup> Secondly, Elderry, Jr. argues that the theme of impersonation is common to Coleridge's work as for example in his poem "Love" which was written at the same time as *Christabel*.<sup>124</sup>

Moving from the character of the vampire to the fragmentary nature of the poem itself, in her book *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love, and the Law Against Divorce*, Anya Taylor also partially compares *Christabel* with another Coleridge's work *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* for she states:

---

<sup>118</sup> B. R. Elderry, Jr., "Coleridge's Plan for Completing 'Christabel,'" *Studies in Philology* 33.3 (1936):447, JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4172330>>, accessed 5<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

<sup>119</sup> Elderry, Jr., 440.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Elderry, Jr., 442-443.

<sup>122</sup> Elderry, Jr., 452.

<sup>123</sup> Elderry, Jr., 444.

<sup>124</sup> Elderry, Jr., 445-446.

Where “The Rime” encapsulates one form of Coleridge’s obsession with will, action, guilt, penance, perpetual torment, and the glimmer of blessing, “Christabel” hides at its centre a different sort of pain. The poem in all three of its segments spins inward to an intricate knot of need, yearning, self-obliteration, and merging.<sup>125</sup>

Taylor continues by stating that Coleridge had certain sympathy for women because he saw himself as weak and empty, even describing himself as “passive” or “absorbed” and in addition to “his sense of himself as yielding, Coleridge is engrossed in the lives and feelings of his many women friends, who by nature or nurture must learn to yield.”<sup>126</sup> Considering the characterization of Christabel, the passive and yielding victim who is metaphorically absorbed by the vampire, it seems evident that Coleridge might have projected himself in her character. However, that being said, it should be noted that there is a paradox in his projection, for he did not see this feature as a favourable one. He wrote to the poet Robert Southey:

A sense of weakness – a haunting sense, that I was an herbaceous Plant, as large as a large Tree, with a Trunk of the Same Girth, & Branches as large & shadowing – but with *pith within* the Trunk, not heart of Wood/- that I had *power* not *strength* – an involuntary Imposter – that I had no real Genius, no real Depth/- / This on my honor is as fair a statement of my habitual Haunting, as I could give before the Tribunal of Heaven/ How it arose in me, I have but lately discovered/ Still it works within me/ but only as a Disease, the cause & meaning of which I know.<sup>127</sup>

If one understands Christabel as Coleridge’s alter-ego in the poem – hence the paradox – the ending proposed by Gilman, as well as any other ending, becomes problematic. If Christabel indeed accomplishes to banish Geraldine or if Geraldine simply disappears for good, the “happy ending” will involve Christabel marrying her knight which would take her back in the status quo of living a life of passivity and submission, for she will become a wife of a lord whose position in a feudal society does not offer much freedom or activity since this world is generally ruled by men, such as her husband, or her father who proved to be a very dominant if not abusive parent.

---

<sup>125</sup> Anya Taylor, *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love, and the Law against Divorce* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) 63.

<sup>126</sup> Taylor, 61-62.

<sup>127</sup> Taylor, 61.

If one imagines the opposite of this and Geraldine somehow survives as well as maintaining her influence over Christabel, she could, as the mother who procreates through blood (and it is suggested that Geraldine could have drunk Christabel's blood), create Christabel as her vampiric offspring. In fact, at one point, Christabel "drew in her breath with a hissing sound" (459), which might indicate that Geraldine's serpentine nature might be influencing her to the point of creating another Geraldine. In that case, Christabel would gain certain characteristics of Geraldine that would make her less of a passive victim and more of a dominant predator. Anya Taylor suggests similar occurrence in terms of exchange or rather passing on of certain features:

In the midsection of the poem, then, a transfer of power seems to occur; one young woman absorbs another, eradicates her will and her speech, deprives her of the imaginary protective spirit of her mother and the fragile loyalty of her father, and fills her with the underside of her own vicious features.<sup>128</sup>

However, it seems evident that the dichotomy does not quite appear to be an adequate explanation of what is happening in the text. Despite Coleridge being at odds with his passive nature, he appears to be celebrating the passivity and weakness in contrast with the dominance and agency in the poem, because it seems that the only way for Christabel to break from the submission is to break from the patriarchal system through Geraldine who is, rather ironically, described as the villain of the story. In both cases, Christabel loses something, either her innocence or her agency, as if the poet could not decide which one is more important or whether one can exist with the other. The depiction of Geraldine as a female vampire is used as a negative one – as was mentioned before, the female vampire often represents a deep transgression against the patriarchal system and is, therefore, depicted in a negative light. Yet Coleridge himself was a person who resented his passive nature, decided to project himself into the character of Christabel and planned a story similar to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* about sin and redemption. However, if Gilman's ending is the one to follow, Coleridge's alter-ego would end up in the position of passivity which might suggest a dead end concerning the problem of agency of Christabel, and Coleridge himself. On the other hand, the only active woman in the story is depicted as a demon woman and the poem as it stands offers no plausible way for her to survive or at least help Christabel to assume her own personality and will.

---

<sup>128</sup> Taylor, 70.

## 5.2 Abjection, Gender, and Female Agency

The vampiric character of Geraldine has a lot in common with Lamia and *la belle dame* for all of them are presented as deadly lovers who bring with their love and passion only death and destruction. Lamia even carries the name of a vampiric creature from Greek mythology and *la belle dame* includes many references to Lamia which makes it clear that the two women have many similarities.

In *Christabel*, Geraldine appears to be presented also as a female vampire with numerous references to her looks and behaviour. From the beginning Geraldine is described as a woman whose complexion appears to be even paler than her white dress. Christabel finds Geraldine on a cold night wearing a dress unfit for such weather, with naked arms and neck, which does not seem to vex her, so it can be assumed that Geraldine has an insusceptibility to the cold, one that “normal” individuals do not possess. Another vampiric feature very popular in literature is the idea that a vampire has to be invited inside to be able to step in through the door, and we see this in the poem for Geraldine first asks Christabel to help her stand when she says: “Stretch forth thy hand...And help a wretched maid to flee” (102-103). Furthermore, stepping through the iron gates, Geraldine sinks down in pain at the doorstep and Christabel physically helps her inside. In these two occasions Geraldine demands physical invitation by hand or in Christabel’s arms to enter the castle just like many other later depictions of various vampires. In another example, Geraldine repeatedly refuses holy symbols and prayers; firstly, she refuses to pay respects to Virgin Mary using her tiredness as an excuse and, secondly, in Christabel’s chamber she seems to be struck down by the silver chain with a figure of an angel attached to it.

All of the three female vampires also carry certain motherly characteristics. After all, as Susanne Kord stated (as mentioned above), the female vampire represents the kind of a mother that brings death and destruction to her children instead of life and vitality, so in a way she is the antithesis of a mother.<sup>129</sup> Lamia nourishes Lycius in her palace, *la belle dame* brings the knight honey and mana, but Geraldine’s part as a mother is even more complicated. Geraldine seems to be slightly older than Christabel although she is described as her mother after the fateful night they spend together:

---

<sup>129</sup> Susanne Kord in *The Universal Vampire: Origins and Evolution of a Legend*, 123-124.

And lo! the worker of these harms,  
That holds the maiden in her arms,  
Seems to slumber still and mild,  
As a mother with her child. (298-301)

However, she still struggles against Christabel's real mother who has died in childbirth although she swore to look after her daughter until she gets married. At one point, Geraldine has to banish the mother's spirit to be able to take over Christabel:

'Off, woman, off! this hour is mine—  
Though thou her guardian spirit be,  
Off, woman, off! 'tis given to me.' (211-213)

Therefore, while Christabel's real mother is depicted as the protective spirit who wants to shield her daughter's innocence until her wedding night, Geraldine is a mother who is also "the worker of these harms," the mother that uses her child to feed her own hunger. Further in the story, Geraldine gradually takes over the social role of the mother as Sir Leoline, Christabel's father, seems to be enthralled by her charms.

Nevertheless, the important part of a female vampire is also her sexuality and "harmful" agency. As already mentioned by Tumini, the female vampire archetype poses an even more serious threat to the patriarchal society<sup>130</sup> which is built on the theory that a woman should be obedient, submissive and sexually passive. Geraldine is a beautiful young woman who seems to be more experienced than Christabel and indeed she also appears to be on a mission to corrupt the innocent Christabel in order to take over the castle as the lady, if not the sole lady of the castle as it is stated by Christabel that her father is sick. Tumini also adds that female vampires can gain certain masculine traits as bloodsucking, which is seen as such due to its penetrating characteristics.<sup>131</sup> Therefore, Geraldine appears in the castle as the agent of corruption of the ideal of the traditionally submissive woman and the patriarchal system as a whole, for she has the potential to overpower the male leader and become the ruler herself.

The means Geraldine uses to gain power over her surroundings is her sexuality which is depicted as something unholy, forbidden, and almost evil in the poem; however, the poet still describes it in detail and as something pleasant and fascinating:

---

<sup>130</sup> Tumini, 124.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,  
And slowly rolled her eyes around;  
Then drawing in her breath aloud,  
Like one that shuddered, she unbound  
The cincture from beneath her breast:  
Her silken robe, and inner vest,  
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,  
Behold! her bosom and half her side—  
A sight to dream of, not to tell!  
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel! (245-254)

Although being under the spell Christabel similarly appears to have conflicted feelings about the experience as she simultaneously weeps and smiles. The sexual experience itself is redefined as dark magic, as a type of evil spell of silence, which makes the accursed one incapable to speak about it. Metaphorically, the poem describes sexual activity between the women as a shameful taboo:

'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,  
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!  
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,  
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow; (267-270)

Later in the poem, when Christabel appears to be remembering the experience of the last night, it is described as something traumatic and monstrous:

She shrunk and shuddered, and saw again—  
(Ah, woe is me! Was it for thee,  
Thou gentle maid! such sights to see?)

Again she saw that bosom old,  
Again she felt that bosom cold,  
And drew in her breath with a hissing sound:  
Whereat the Knight turned wildly round,



And nothing saw, but his own sweet maid  
With eyes upraised, as one that prayed. (454-462)

Generally, Geraldine's sexuality is seen as something negative, something to be hidden, to be erased by a curse, not to mention the grotesque transformation of Geraldine's body from previously beautiful and attractive to old and shrivelled. As Tumini mentions, sexism and gender play an important role in the narratives with female vampires as the story of a sinful woman prone to evil goes further back to the Bible<sup>132</sup> in the form of Lilith and Eve where the first one is depicted as an evil and rebellious woman and the other as the reason for human suffering. Geraldine shares some references to the biblical evil woman in her serpentine description delivered by the bard who reveals his prophetic dream about a green serpent choking a dove. The dream very well describes the polarity of the two female characters Christabel and Geraldine. Christabel is a young woman whose innocence is protected by her mother's spirit, she seems very naïve and inexperienced considering her lack of concern regarding her meeting with Geraldine, especially because Geraldine's story appears dubious. As her name reminds the reader, Christabel is the innocent dove whom we meet as a saint, but equally featuring as a misguided woman praying at the pagan oak tree. She is the silent and passive woman, whose innocence is abused by the evil vampire (although she is not sure whether the experience was good or bad to begin with).

In contrast, Geraldine is represented as the serpent, a corruptive mother and disruptive woman who comes to take over the innocent women and weak old men wielding her sexuality as her weapon. Her sexuality and will are depicted as black magic, an evil ritual where the vampire draws vitality from her victim, subsequently gaining strength. Her will is also seen as something unwanted:

A star hath set, a star hath risen,  
O Geraldine! since arms of thine  
Have been the lovely lady's prison.  
O Geraldine! one hour was thine—  
Thou'st had thy will! By tairn and rill,  
The night-birds all that hour were still.  
But now they are jubilant anew,

---

<sup>132</sup> Tumini, 123.

From cliff and tower, tu—whoo! tu—whoo!

Tu—whoo! tu—whoo! from wood and fell! (302-310)

She exercised her will which included imprisoning the innocent under a spell, the sin accompanied by the silence of the birds, signalling that there is something amiss. Therefore, the character of Geraldine, similarly to Lamia and *la belle dame*, carries certain crucial abject characteristics such as deadly motherhood and disruptive sexuality. Her sexuality and agency are further described as something undesirable which is to be hidden for its evil nature, in contrast to the passive Christabel who is the ideal woman, the innocent, inexperienced and sheltered traditional heroine.

## 6 Conclusion

The character of the vampire seems almost like a cliché to the contemporary reader as the image of it appears in almost every form of media, be it literature, film, comic books or video games. The most famous vampire of our time is Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; however, he did not appear out of thin air from the writer's imagination at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although many studies list him as the most prominent literary vampire, while completely omitting the previous representations in English literature. The origins of both male and female vampires run deep into literary and folkloric history or even mythology as various cultures have their own versions and depictions of the revenant dead who suck the blood of their victims. Stoker's *Dracula* had an immense impact on the whole emergent phenomenon, so that today the word "vampire" is strongly associated with Romanian Transylvania where the author set a part of the story and located the homeland of the protagonist.

However, if we look into the British literary history of vampiric characters, Transylvania is nowhere to be found before Stoker's novel, and more importantly, *Dracula* is not the first vampire nor even the first vampire of his kind. If we go back to the Romantic movement in Britain, we find male and female vampires that strongly influenced future generations of authors and shaped the vampires we see on television or the big screen today. But who were these first vampires in English literature and how did they get there? What did they represent and symbolize? These questions are not easy to answer, as each Romantic vampire has a different set of characteristics and each author, such as Lord Byron, John Polidori, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats, had different intentions behind the creation of their vampires, although all of them gave a certain shape to their characters, the aspects of which the vampire has carried for decades and even centuries until this day.

Lord Byron's *The Giaour* presents the vampire as the colonial oppressor, although his identification is not as easy as the author himself intended him to be, perhaps. The *Giaour* may have been a hero in Byron's eyes but from a post-colonial point of view he quite coincidentally shares many things with his enemy Hassan who might be perceived as the intentional colonial tyrant, as he represents the main oppressive power, the Ottoman Empire, which Byron fought against in the war for Greek independence. However, the *Giaour*'s characterization as a liberator is more than problematic due to the fact that he does not liberate, realizing that he is responsible for Leila's death. The fisherman's curse then becomes more of the *Giaour*'s own curse as he decides to spend his life isolated in a monastery. His demeanour and even appearance point to the emergence of the Byronic hero, where the vampire functions as the extreme version of it as the ultimate outcast outside traditional morality and society.

Nevertheless, to judge any character in the poem seems rather complicated due to the intentionally fragmented nature of the text itself. From three different narrators we read three different stories and three different versions of the Giaour (or any character). This brings the character of the vampire, the symbol of a fragment, into the world of modernity where nothing and no one is complete and where the human mind is a complex mosaic of thoughts and traits, often contradictory and illogical. With these incoherent and chaotically arranged shards of the character it is impossible to create one coherent whole, which defies the traditional narrative concepts of identity.

The most influential male vampire, Lord Ruthven, was written by John Polidori, but the influence of Lord Byron on the character is indisputable. Although the plot derives originally from Byron's fragment of a mysterious story, it was Polidori who created the character of the aristocratic vampire and thus provided the foundation for Dracula. Lord Ruthven was certainly influenced by the Byronic hero, which is itself Byron's literary alter-ego (therefore a view from within), but also by how Polidori (and others in their own works) reflected on Byron's personality, attitude, and notorious reputation mostly in negative ways (a view from without). Byron's status of celebrity, in fact the first modern celebrity in English literature, helped to create the character of the vampire in a metaphorical way, as the fame (or infamy) of the celebrity is based on vampiric tendencies. The vampiric exchange of life energy takes place in various directions. Firstly, to keep the status of celebrity alive, it has to devour people's reputation to increase its own. Secondly, the audience's demand for gossip and rumours requires more and more scandals from the author, metaphorically feeding on his "life". Thirdly, the status of celebrity essentially feeds itself on rumours overshadowing the author, thus acquiring a vampiric life of its own and supplanting the actual person of the author.

Although the female vampire is also a mosaic of fragments, her fragmentation is concerned with the topic of female gender, sexuality and agency. Coleridge's *Christabel* is also a fragment, although unintended, and upon further research, understandably left so. If Coleridge really projected his passivity onto the character of Christabel, any form of ending is indeed impossible, for she either ends up as a submissive wife of a knight in feudal society or remains cursed and tainted by a demon woman who is from the very beginning of the poem described in an ambiguous and increasingly negative way. The only potentially active woman in the poem is depicted as a vampire who uses sexuality to gain power. Her sexuality is described as unnatural black magic or unspeakable taboo and her body in terms of abjection attractive and repulsive at the same time. It seems that Coleridge had an issue with the coexistence of innocence and agency in one person, which is emphasised in the symbolic polarity of the dove and the serpent.

Keats's *Lamia* and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" both depict powerful women who take male lovers who eventually feel trapped in their passion. While *Lamia* lowers her status for love, Lycius wants to subdue her, and so, together with Apollonius, the men become the unobvious vampires in the poem. *Lamia*'s will to live outside traditional morality and her untrammelled agency is seen as something corruptive and dangerous for which she has to be expelled from the society of men (humans). *La belle dame*, possibly influenced by Keats's relationship with Fanny Brawne, further emphasises Keats's ambivalent attitude towards women and female sexuality and agency. While he adores them and puts them on pedestal, as evidenced from his letters, he also scorns them and reproaches their open sexuality and agency in society. In fact, Keats creates his ideal woman, an angel, and when met with a real woman gets increasingly disenchanted and antagonistic – perhaps because of his terminal illness and the disillusionment and fear it brings into his worldview. Coincidentally, *la belle dame* has no voice in the poem to express her own personality and it is the knight, and Keats, who express their idea of her will and agency and their destructive effects.

The vampire as a symbol of fragmentation works in various ways in these texts. In the case of the male vampire, it introduces a new kind of character and world consisting of bits and pieces of reality which never create a coherent, unambiguous whole. While the male vampire is a step forward, the female vampire still lingers between two extremes. Coleridge shows us two different women, symbolized by a dove and a serpent, two extremes that are, according to Coleridge, incompatible in one person due to the traditional and outdated depiction of each, specifically in the form of two extremes of a saint and an evil woman prevalent since the Middle Ages. Furthermore, considering medieval influences, both *Christabel* and "La Belle Dame sans Merci" take place in a sort of dreamy worlds full of ambiguity using the form of the medieval ballad and thus, similarly to the outdated and ambiguous depiction of the female characters, the obsolete form with its obsolete morals and stereotypes seems to offer only limited space for expression. However, probably owing to his affinity to the feminine voice in poetry, Coleridge realizes that the traditional and simplistic depiction of female characters is not realistic and sufficient to truly capture a woman's mind in literature, leaving *Christabel* unfinished.

Keats reinvents the myth of the *lamia* and the female vampire and instead of a man-devouring blood-sucking monster presents the ambiguous character of *Lamia*, the tender-hearted lover with supernatural abilities which she uses to create illusion and luxury, and who is determined to trade her superiority for love, but is eventually betrayed by the men who are limited by "cold" philosophy and traditional morality. Keats seems to prefer her character to the characters of Lycius and Apollonius and yet she and *la belle dame* are eventually expelled

from the world of humans for seemingly no reason other than their inherent otherness. Apollonius has no rational reason to hate Lamia (his fear of ‘the snake’ bears little relation to Lamia herself as we have come to know her) and Lycius’ problem lies within his concern about public opinion. *La belle dame*, a kind of a female noble savage character in the knight’s description, has no voice in the poem and although the knight claims she wanted to enslave him (and possibly kill him), the reader has no proof of his statement that it was so. Therefore, *la belle dame*’s silence can be understood as a loud protest against the idea that despite obviously missing information (the lady’s words) only the man’s version of the story is sufficient in explaining the whole situation and considered truthful beyond any doubt.

We are therefore left with an unresolvable ambiguity at the end of our journey in search of literary vampires – be it anchored in formal and symbolic fragmentation, gender complexities of representation, or the correlation with the author’s own biography. Romantic vampires pave the way for modernity’s fragmented narrative identity and issue forth literary selves that are riddled with more questions than ever before.

## 7 Bibliography

### Primary:

Lord Byron, George Gordon. *The Giaour. The Works of Lord Byron*. Ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922.

Lord Byron, George Gordon. *A Fragment*.

<<http://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Byron/fragment.html>>. Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Poetry & Prose*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945.

Polidori, John. *The Vampyre and Other Tales of Macabre*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Keats, John. *Complete Poems*. Ed. Jack Stillinger. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

### Secondary:

Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Braccini, Tommaso. *Před Draculou Archeologie upíra*. Bologna: il Mulino, 2011. Přel. Tereza Siegllová (Praha: Argo, 2014).

Brodman, Barbara, and Doan, James E. *The Universal Vampire: Origins and Evolution of a Legend*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press and The Rowan & Littlefield Pub. Group, Inc., 2013.

Ellis, David. *Byron in Geneva*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011.

Keats, John. *Letters of John Keats*. Ed. Hugh l'Ansou Fausset. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1970.

Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Resnick, Irvn M., and Kitchell Jr., Kenneth F. "The Sweepings of Lamia:" *Transformation of the Myth of Lilith and Lamia. Religion, Gender, and the Culture in the Pre-Modern World*. Ed. Cuffel, Alexandra, and Britt, Bryan. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Taylor, Anya. *Erotic Coleridge: Women, Love, and the Law against Divorce*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.

Thorslev, Jr., Peter L. *The Byronic Hero*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1962.

Twitchell, James B. *The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1981.

Zamarovský, Vojtěch. *Bohové a hrdinové antických bájí*. Praha: Mladá fronta, 1982.

Allport, Andrew. "The Romantic Fragment Poem and the Performance of the Form." *Studies in Romanticism* 51.3 (2012): 399-417. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/24247307>>. Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

Elderry, Jr., B.R. "Coleridge's Plan for Completing 'Christabel.'" *Studies in Philology* 33.3 (1936): 437-455. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4172330>>. Accessed 5<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

Meyer, Eric. "'I Know Thee not, I Loathe Thy Race': Romantic Orientalism in the Eye of the Other." *ELH* 58.3 (1991): 657-699. JSTOR <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/2873460>>. Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.

McGann, Jerome J. "Hero with a Thousand Faces: The Rhetoric of Byronism." *Studies in Romanticism* 31.3 (1992): 295-313. JSTOR <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25600964>>. Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018.

"Romantic Orientalism: Overview." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* <[https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic\\_4/welcome.htm](https://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/romantic/topic_4/welcome.htm)>. Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.



Tuite, Clara. "Tainted Love and Romantic 'Literary Celebrity.'" *ELH* 74.1 (2007): 59-88.  
JSTOR < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/30029546>>. Accessed 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2018.